



# THE HISTORY OF BENGAL

## (1757-1905)

*Edited By*

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## FOREWORD

This History of Bengal covers the period from the battle of Plassey to the First Partition. It is a companion volume to the History of Bengal in two volumes, published by the University of Dacca, in 1943 and in 1948, on Hindu and Muslim periods. There has been a long interval between the inception of this work and its passing through the press. The editor has explained the reasons for this delay. It is not necessary to recapitulate the difficulties he faced. Some of them are perhaps inherent in projects of this kind. Funds were made available for this publication by the University Grants Commission, Government of West Bengal and the University of Calcutta. It is a great pity that Dr. R. C. Mitra, whose valuable contribution on education in Bengal has enriched this publication, did not live to see it in print. On behalf of the University of Calcutta and of the History of Bengal Publication Committee I thank all those learned scholars whose contributions have made this publication possible.

*R. Mallick*  
*22<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 1967*

*Vice Chancellor, University of Calcutta.*



## PREFACE

This History of Bengal scheme was formulated by the history department of the University of Calcutta in 1961. It was approved by the University, the University Grants Commission and the Government of West Bengal. The grant was considered to be adequate. Work was begun in earnest. Planning, allotment of chapters and other details were settled very quickly. Then for more than three years there was no progress. Office expense proved to be a great burden. As editor I faced the gloomy prospect of being completely discredited. Then we appealed to our colleague Sri Nisith Ranjan Ray to become honorary secretary of the publication committee and save the situation. He agreed with some hesitation. But so much money was already spent that we could no longer maintain an office establishment. Though some of the contributors were very prompt there were others who informed the editor after three or four years that they could not find time. No one is perhaps indispensable. But it is always difficult to replace writers under such schemes at short notice. After repeated disappointments we have been able to complete the original project with only one important gap in coverage ; there is no separate chapter on Law and Justice.

Apart from planning, allotment of chapters and reallocation in some cases the editorial touch has been very light. The contributors are responsible for their chapter content and their view point. Though there are some contradictory views in some chapters it was not considered a part of editorial responsibility to reconcile these views. But it is a joint work of us all, not a patchwork or a disjointed series of writings. We were placed in such an awkward position by useless spending for three years that we could not secure the services of an expert proof-reader. The secretary and the editor took upon themselves the responsibility of proof-reading. It was also a race against time in the last stages because the dead line was 31st December 1967.

This hurry in the last two or three months is responsible for some of the shortcomings of this production. The chapter on



agrarian history was sent by the contributor in August 1966. He was then in England. He is still there. We could not send him the proofs and we could not wait for the concluding portion of his paper. He is still working on the subject and intends to publish his dissertation in the near future. He wrote to me that he was anxious to make changes in his article here and there. But this was not possible because the press had set it in type. In the printed pages we could notice some mistakes. 'Production efforts' should be productive efforts. In the section on Rent-legislation we should read while in Bihar Haliday for 'While in Bihar Dalhousie'. In the same manner in the chapter on Social Change we notice a wrong date. 1833 should be 1835. But we have not added an 'errata' because the list does not appear to be long and we are not in a position to make it exhaustive: some of the printing mistakes are obvious. As the contributor to Section ii of the chapter on Religion was unable to see through his coverage, the work of completing it was entrusted to the writer of the Section on Hinduism.

As this volume passes through the press I should thank all those historians who have contributed to it. The most eminent of them is Dr. R. C. Majumdar, the doyen of Indian historians, who had long ago edited History of Bengal Vol. I for the University of Dacca. Some of those who declined to contribute their chapters three or four years after they had agreed to write perhaps thought of the project as my personal venture. I should therefore be all the more grateful to those who thought otherwise and extended their cooperation. Late Dr. R. C. Mitra was the first contributor who completed his chapter. Unfortunately he died long before it could be printed.

Our thanks are due to Dr. Dipak K. Das and Messrs. Sukumar Bhattacharya, Ajit K. Niyogi and Bijan Goswami for their patient labour in preparing the Index. We should place on record our appreciation of the ready assistance we received from Sri Gouranga Press.

It was intended at one time to formulate another publication project, another volume of the history of Bengal from Partition to Partition, with the assistance of research workers and the cooperation of historians. The U.G.C. visiting team which expressed its approval of this scheme of history from



1905 to 1947 in general terms, wanted it to be undertaken after the publication of this volume. But this experience of dependence upon the convenience of a large number of scholars, who have their many preoccupations and some of whom back out at the last moment, has scared me away from all such projects. I do not think I should make myself responsible for such a difficult venture after six years' experience of this publication scheme. I prefer to plough my lonely furrow.

My grateful thanks are due to my colleague Sri Nisith Ranjan Ray. He has more than compensated for the lack of cooperation on the part of some others. For the completion of this project credit should go to him and not to the editor. He averted failure.

*Ms. Sinha*  
Editor.





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# BANDE MATARAM

(Translation in Verse)

BY SRI AUROBINDO

Mother, I bow to thee !  
Rich with thy hurrying streams,  
Bright with thy orchard gleams,  
Cool with thy winds of delight,  
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,  
Mother free.

Glory of moonlight dreams,  
Over thy branches and lordly streams,  
Clad in thy blossoming trees,  
Mother, giver of ease,  
Laughing low and sweet !  
Mother, I kiss thy feet,  
Speaker sweet and low !  
Mother, to thee I bow.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,  
When the swords flash out in twice seventy million hands  
And seventy million voices roar  
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore ?  
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,  
To thee I call, Mother and Lord !  
Thou who savest, arise and save !  
To her I cry who ever her foemen drove  
Back from plain and sea  
And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,  
Thou art heart, our soul, our breath,  
Thou the love divine, the awe  
In our hearts that conquers death.

Thine the strength that nerves the arm,  
Thine the beauty, thine the charm.  
Every image made divine  
In our temples is but thine.





Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen,  
With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen,  
Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,  
And the Muse a hundred-toned.  
Pure and perfect without peer,  
Mother, lend thine ear.

Rich with thy hurrying streams,  
Bright with thy orchard gleams,  
Dark of hue, O candid-fair  
In thy soul, with jewelled hair  
And thy glorious smile divine,  
Loveliest of all earthly lands,  
Showering wealth from well-stored hands!  
Mother, Mother mine!  
Mother sweet, I bow to thee,  
Mother great and free!



# BANDE MATARAM

(Translation in Prose)

BY SRI AUROBINDO

I bow to thee, Mother,  
richly-watered, richly-fruited,  
cool with the winds of the south,  
dark with the crops of the harvests,  
the Mother !

Her nights rejoicing in the glory of the moonlight,  
her lands clothed beautifully with her trees  
in flowering bloom,  
sweet of laughter, sweet of speech,  
the Mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss !

Terrible with the clamorous shout of  
seventy million throats,  
and the sharpness of swords raised in twice  
seventy million hands,  
Who sayeth to thee, Mother, that thou art weak ?

Holder of multitudinous strength,  
I bow to her who saves,  
to her who drives from her the armies of her foemen  
the Mother !

Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct,  
thou our heart, thou our soul,  
for thou art the life in our body.

In the arm thou art might, O Mother,  
in the heart, O Mother, thou art love and faith,  
it is thy image we raise in every temple.  
For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war,  
Kamala at play in the lotuses  
and Speech, the goddess, giver of all lore,  
to thee I bow !

I bow to thee, goddess of wealth,  
pure and peerless,  
richly-watered, richly fruited,  
the Mother !





I bow to thee, Mother,  
dark-hued, candid,  
sweetly smiling, jewelled and adorned,  
the holder of wealth, the lady of plenty,  
the Mother !

—*Karmayogin*—20th November, 1909.

Translator's note :

It is difficult to translate the National Anthem of Bengal into verse in another language owing to its unique union of sweetness, simple directness and high poetic force. All attempts in this direction have been failures. In order, therefore, to bring the reader unacquainted with Bengali nearer to the exact force of the original, I give the translation in prose line by line.

[It is now a National Song of India]



## INTRODUCTION

The distant cannonade at Plassey on the 23rd June, 1757, described as a 'battle', was fought one year and two days after the capture of Calcutta by Nawab Siraj-ud-daula. This capture of Calcutta by the Nawab in 1756, recovery of the city by the British, Mir Jafar's conspiracy and this decisive 'battle' on the 23rd June, 1757, formed the train of events that marked the end of the government of the Nawabs of Bengal. Life in India under the British became so very different from what it was in those days that it is very difficult to form any idea of the state of things in Bengal before Plassey. Mughal rule in Bengal had throughout the seventeenth century the character of a foreign conquest. The higher offices were filled by men from Delhi. They formed the retinue of the Subahdars and they came and went away with them. But there was a complete change in the character of Mughal administration in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Murshid Quli Khan was appointed Diwan of Bengal in 1700, Naib Subahdar in 1707, Subahdar in 1717. Alivardi died in 1756. During these years 1700-1756 there was in Bengal a system of civil administration which was certainly efficient by the standard of the eighteenth century. A creeping paralysis overtook Mughal administration in other parts of India but not in Bengal. Murshid Quli Khan and his two successors cast Bengal administration into a new mould. Attention has been focussed by Macaulay on "those nominal sovereigns, sunk in indolence and debauchery, who sauntered away life in secluded palaces, chewing bhang, fondling concubines and listening to buffoons". But Mir Jafar (June 1757—October 1760 ; July 1763—February 1765), Najm-ud-daula (February 1765—May 1766), Saif-ud-daula (1766-1770) and Mubarak-ud-daula (1770-1793) cannot be associated with any effective governance in Bengal before the British finally took over in 1772. They were puppets, 'jackasses', of Clive and his successors.

But the proceedings, political and military, that led to the battle of Plassey exposed the inherent weakness of the government of the Nawabs. The Bengal Revolution of 1757 repeated some of the attitudes of the Revolution of 1740. It has been said that the battle of Plassey was the reply of divine justice to the battle of Giria which in secular terms might mean beginning of a succession of evils. A band of foreign adventurers—Persian, Central Asian and Afghan soldiers of fortune—thronged the Court at Murshidabad. They formed the main strength of the army of the Nawabs. Murshid Quli Khan had only put an end to their dominance in civil administration, 'their gross fiscal tyranny and illegal exactions' (Sarkar—*History of Bengal* Vol. II). Treachery, ingratitude and restless ambition were the distinctive traits of this band of foreign adventurers. Ghulam Husain, in his *Seir-ul-Mutakkerin*, refers to the treacherous



character of the Afghans in the Bengal army. But the words used by him could very well form a general statement applicable to all those adventurers who thronged the court and camp of the Nawabs of Bengal—"unmoved by the rights of gratitude and unaffected by benefits received, they pay little attention to their benefactors and even to the rights of friendship..... cast a wistful eye upon that pomp and that wealth of Bengal which endlessly blazed in review before (their) eyes" (*Seir* Vol. I p. 438 Cambray ed.). Alivardi himself was a traitor to his master. When he killed Sarfaraz, the son of his benefactor, at Giria in 1740 and succeeded in getting his usurpation legalized by the Mughal emperor in return for a *peshkash* or present, the moral bankruptcy of the Mughal empire became only too patent. His example was very likely to be only too faithfully followed. When Mir Habib deserted to the Marathas in 1742, when Mir Jafar, Roy Durlabh and Yar Latif refused to take any part in the battle of Plassey and stood with folded arms in the battle field, they must have thought that the path which Alivardi had trod was the path of good luck. The conspiracy of 1757 resembled that of 1739-40. But circumstances in 1757 were so very different from those in 1740. Alivardi could ultimately get rid of the Afghan mercenaries. The conspirators at Plassey depended very much upon the aid of a foreign power. This proved to be their undoing.

Murshid Quli Khan could maintain peace in Bengal with a standing army of 2000 horsemen and 4000 infantry. But this parsimony created great difficulty when the peace of the western parts of the province was disturbed by Maratha raiders during the years 1742-51. Alivardi depended on Afghan mercenaries who twice rebelled against him. The fighting machine was very inefficient but Alivardi's leadership was most effective. In those days he "had not his equal in the art of ranging an army in battle and in choosing a post" (*Seir* II p. 52). But Siraj was inexperienced and incapable. Contingents under different chieftains, 'a huge, many-coloured crowd of men, horses and elephants' faced the British at Plassey. Of the 53 pieces of artillery with which Siraj tried to fight at Plassey 41 pieces did not fire a single shot. Soldiers who did not take part in the battle decided the day.

The details of the story of the murder of Nasir Jang, the establishment of a French protectorate at Haiderabad and a British protectorate at Arcot, were not unknown in Bengal. Alivardi himself was not unconscious of this source of danger. He kept the British in Bengal under sufficient control. He perhaps thought that competition between European companies—he permitted the Danes to settle in Serampore on the recommendation of the French—would keep them too divided to become politically formidable. Ghulam Husain tells us that Alivardi was apprehensive that a court faction would perhaps utilise the services of Englishmen and his successor's fate would be like that of Nasir Jang (*Seir* II, p. 163). Ghasiti Begam, aunt of Siraj, and her adviser Rajballav, appreciated the power and prestige of the English Company and perhaps wanted its help to



oust Siraj but the young Nawab was too quick for the conspirators. Shaukat Jang, a cousin of Siraj, rose up in arms in Purnea. He was advised to make an alliance with the English against Siraj. Siraj wrote a letter to him 'breathing affection and accepting some of his demands' (*Tarikh-i-Bangala Mahabat Jangi*). But he was too headstrong and precipitate and was overwhelmed. The third attempt to oust Siraj was also made with English help and was crowned with success. Siraj was perhaps anti-English from a sense of self-interest. Mir Jafar could not be altogether unaware of the fact that in case of success his fate would be like that of Muhammad Ali of Arcot and Salabat Jang of Haiderabad. He had made his approaches to Shaukat Jang. He could not perhaps think of the Marathas. The fate of Mir Habib, who had joined the Marathas and was assassinated by them, was fresh in his mind. His memory is branded with infamy because he seized the chance of present success without counting the certainty of future dishonour.

It would be wrong to think that Bengal stood isolated from the rest of India and what took place here was not influenced by what happened in other parts of India. Siraj-ud-daula is pictured as a bundle of nerves, a man of indecision now inimical to the British, now friendly to them, now intent upon befriending the French, again soon after suffering them to be crushed by the British. But the career of Siraj-ud-daula cannot be studied apart from what was taking place at Delhi and Lahore or at Haiderabad and in the Northern Sarkars. Ahmad Shah Abdali, in his fourth Indian expedition, reached Lahore on the 2nd December, 1756, entered Delhi on the 28th January, 1757, sacked and massacred at Mathura on the 1st March, left India in April 1757. There was for some time a strong rumour that he intended advancing eastward. Calcutta was retaken by Clive on the 2nd January 1757 and an alliance was concluded by Siraj with the British on the 9th February. With the opposition of the Nawab suspended, Clive could attack Chandernagore which he took on the 23rd March, 1757. The dates are significant. The Nawab dreaded an invasion by the Afghans and dared not alienate the British who could be of great help in such an emergency. Clive could exploit this advantage to the full. Intrigues at Haiderabad to supplant Bussy also helped the British in Bengal. That brilliant Frenchman was guiding the affairs of Salabat Jang at Haiderabad in the interest of the French. He was dismissed as a consequence of the intrigues of Shah Nawaz Khan in May 1756 and was not reinstated in service until November 1756. But his confidential intercourse with Salabat Jang and his ties with the other chiefs were much shaken and the dependent chieftains in the Northern Sarkars, which had been ceded by the Nizam to the French, tried to shake off French yoke. He was not free to operate against British possessions in India and he had to direct his energy to the re-establishment of French power in the Northern Sarkars.

One of the reasons assigned by the Calcutta Council for joining the conspiracy against Siraj-ud-daula was that he was writing frequently to



Bussy. The court intriguers had, before the battle of Plassey, induced Siraj to send Jean Law and the French fugitives from Chandernagore away to Bihar and after Plassey Siraj-ud-daula was flying to join them when he was captured. Some of the most dependable detachments of the Nawab were still at Patna under Ramnarayan where they had been sent to meet the Afghan invader. The coming of Ahmad Shah Abdali to Delhi and the conspiracy of Shah Nawaz and Nizam Ali at Haiderabad helped the British to win at Plassey almost as much as the inactivity of Mir Jafar, Roy Durlabh and Yar Latif. Young Siraj-ud-daula, 'too ignorant and headstrong to use management with his dislikes' precipitated events. 'His quarrelling and enmity with respectable and noble people had exceeded all bounds and the ashes of disgrace were scattered on his head' (*Tarikh-i-Bangala Mahabat Jangi*). But the train was laid and the explosion would have come even if Siraj-ud-daula were a saint. Political breakdown, military inefficiency, bankruptcy of leadership created all those conditions which lead to violent changes and it would be wrong to seek the dynamics of revolution in any antecedent economic change. Administrative collapse or economic malaise could not be made responsible for the disintegration that overtook the province. The landholders of the country did not call in the English to remove Siraj-ud-daula. The court factions and the Seths engineered the revolution in 1757 as in 1740. The ostentatious activity of Omichand or the distant role of Khawaja Wazid should not be magnified to propound a theory of a comprador revolution. The process cannot be epitomized in such hackneyed terms. The English must have perceived that even without their aid this revolution might take place and that by affording their assistance many advantages would probably accrue to them (Marshman's *History of Bengal*, 1846). It proved to be the beginning of a 'new and anomalous empire'.

The Bengal Nawabs—Murshid Quli, Shuja-ud-din and Alivardi—knew that Bengal's prosperity depended on her external commerce. There was a new structure of foreign trade and full competition existed among European East Indian companies trading in India. The English East India Company succeeded in securing a *farman* in 1717 from Emperor Farrukh Siyar granting the English East India Company's merchandise exemption from duties in return for the payment of a lump sum of Rs. 3000/- a year at Hughli. Their 'Investment' or official export to Europe amounted on an average to about 33 lakhs of rupees. The Company's servants carried on their private trade with the Malabar and Coromandal coasts and with other parts of Asia. Their inland private trade was not very considerable before Plassey. The privilege of trading duty free granted to the Company was extended by them to their own private trade, inter-Asian and coastal. There was a great increase of shipping in Calcutta and this abuse of *dastak* in private trade did not escape the notice of Shuja-ud-din and Alivardi. They compelled the Company whose investment was mixed up with the private trade of their servants to make occasional payments of large sums of money, a very





crude way of making them feel that they were abusing a privilege. The English, the Dutch and the French had to make occasional presents to the under officers of the *darbar* as also to the Nawab. Misuse of *dastaks* or permits in private trade was a standing charge and the servants of the English Company could not very well deny it. In 1753 the English East India Company's servants in India decided to adopt the policy of making investment not through the agency of the country merchants who were known as *dadney* merchants but with the assistance of their servants, their own *gomastahs*. This enabled them to mix up private trade with investment in a more efficacious manner. They could also cover the trade of the country merchants in return for valuable consideration in a much more far-flung manner than before. The abuse of *dastaks* partly contributed to the misunderstanding between Siraj-ud-daula and the British. Siraj is said to have argued that he had a long *dastak* account to settle with the British. He declared that he would prove from vouchers in his possession that the English had defrauded the state to the amount of a crore and a half by covering the trade of the 'natives' with the Company's *dastak*. He demanded that they should admit a fauzdar into Calcutta and they would be permitted to trade on paying the Armenian duties, i.e., 3½ per cent. The abuse of *dastaks* was a very fair cause of complaint (India Office Eur. D. 283).

The Farrukh-Siyar *Farman* which governed the attitude of the government of the Nawabs to the English East India Company deserves to be studied very thoroughly. According to this *farman* trade of the English East India was to continue to be subject to the yearly payment of only Rs. 3,000/- at Hughli. The Company was confirmed in their rentings of Calcutta, Sutanati and Govindpur. They were further permitted to purchase 38 villages around these townships from their respective owners with the permission of the Diwan of the Suba. Madras Arcot coins, if they were as good as those coined at Surat, were to pass in Bengal without discount. Imperial commands or *hasb-ul-hukms*, noted at the back of the *farman*, granted two more privileges. A *dastak* or permit, given by the chief of the factory, would exempt the goods from examination by the Nawab's officers. The Subahdar would permit the coining of the Company's bullion in the mint at Murshidabad when other merchants' money would be coined, if this was not against the interest of the government. The discretion which was left to the delegated authority of the government of Bengal by the *hasb-ul-hukm* was exercised by Murshid Quli Khan. No government of these days was in a position to control discount rates on a variety of coins. That depended upon money-changers and bankers. Under these circumstances there could not be any imperial mandate. Murshid Quli Khan's dislike of the sale of zamindaris to the English East India Company was so well known that no zamindar dared sell his zamindari to the Company. There was no Bengal government order prohibiting this sale. Indirect discouragement was perhaps enough. But the Calcutta Council used a subterfuge. They purchased some



neighbouring villages in the names of their native servants. The Nawab's government was not unaware of these transactions. According to the *farman* approval was to be given only after the purchase transaction was completed. (*az malikan kherid nemayend Dewanyan Suba wagozarend*) There was really no defiance of the order of the central government.

If we study the language of the farmans and sanads of the Mughal period 1717-1724 we find that in those cases where compliance was demanded without fail the word fixed (*mukarrar*) invariably occurred. In the grants of Chauth, Sardesmukhi and Swarajya to the Marathas in 1719 this word occurs in all the documents. But in the case of this Farrukh-Siyar *farman* and *hasb-ul-hukm* sufficient authority was vested in the Subahdar for the exercise of discretion in the interest of the government. The privileges which they were already enjoying by a *nishan* or sealed permit of prince Shuja granted in 1651—duty free trade on payment of 3000 rupees, and the rights over Calcutta whether zamindari or talukdari—were confirmed. Beyond this scope was left for the exercise of discretion by the government of Bengal. It has been said that the battle of Plassey was fought to regain the rights granted by the *farman* and *hasb-ul-hukm* which were denied by the Nawabs of Bengal. The theory of Nawabi intransigence is based on a misinterpretation of the language of the farman and of the administrative practices of the day.

Alivardi took 'casual aids' from the European companies. Before him Shuja-ud-din had also made demands on the ground of the extension of English private trade and abuse of *dastaks*. Orme wrote in 1752: "The pay of a very numerous standing army has obliged him (Alivardi) to be more rapacious than any of his predecessors were; the merchants therefore are obliged to buy their trade at dearer exactions than they were ever known to suffer. But the prince has not yet exceeded so much as to leave the commerce of the province destitute of a profit sufficient to excite adventurers" (*Historical Fragments*, p. 416). Alivardi would not permit the English and the French to fight each other in Bengal as they fought in the Carnatic. He succeeded, as the Dutch put it, in maintaining freedom of trade in the Ganges. The affair of Commodore Griffin best illustrates the strength of the government under Alivardi. The plea of the East India Company's men that the goods of the Armenian merchants were seized by the British king's ships and not by the Company's ships was overruled. They were charged with piracy and threatened with chastisement. *Amende honourable* was demanded by the Nawab and the Calcutta council had to yield. When the British attacked Chandernagore the French Chief was not so well prepared "especially since such a happening had not taken place from the founding of Calcutta and Faras-danga (Chandernagore)"—(*Tarikh-i-Bangala-Mahabat Jangi*).

The East India Company's official trade-investment amounted to about 36 lakhs of rupees in 1729, 30 lakhs in 1746 and 33 lakhs in 1751-52. The Bargi incursions might explain this slight decline. But investment procurement system was changed by the Calcutta council in 1753. This



change was guided possibly by corrupt motives. The English Company's servants in Bengal had been practically ousted by the Dutch from trade with the west coast of India. They therefore tried to make up for it by changing the system of investment. It facilitated extension of their privileged private trade. This new system of procurement could not immediately be as effective as the old and investment declined during the years 1753-54. In 1756 they could not make any investment because of their war with Siraj-ud-daula. Therefore investment which had not appreciably declined during the period of Bargi incursions showed a sharp decline during the years 1753-56. But these figures give a misleading impression of Bengal's trade in the years before Plassey. Trade in Bengal made a rapid recovery from the shock of Bargi incursions. Between January 1756 and January 1757 the Dutch imported silver valued at 31,68,681 guilders (1 guilder=1sh. 8d.). Their total export of goods from Bengal to Europe and to Batavia from June 1756 to February 1757 was valued at 42,19,737 guilders. (Letters to Amsterdam from A. Bisdom January 1756 and February 1757). Ten ships with their cargo were sent from Bengal in nine months. But the Dutch did not enjoy any respect as a military and naval power in Bengal. They had given great offence to Alivardi Khan because they had helped the partisans of Sarfaraz Khan. They also leaned over to the Marathas at the time of Bargi incursions. Moreover they had their hands too full elsewhere. Two French ships came in 1755 to Pondichery. They were used in inter-Asian trade. They went direct to Europe with their cargoes. The Danes established themselves in Serampore in 1755. They sent one ship with its cargo to Denmark in 1755. A Portuguese ship left for Europe with its cargo in 1755 and they intended to send two more ships in September 1756. (A. Bisdom's Letter January, 1756). British Investment consisted of cotton piecegoods, silk piecegoods, rawsilk and saltpetre. Their import consisted mainly of one commodity—silver bullion. The Dutch exported saltpetre, opium, raw silk and silk goods and calicos. Until the appointment of Dupleix at Chandernagore in 1732 French trade in Bengal was not very considerable. During the decade 1732-42 there was a steady increase of French trade. Dupleix also developed commercial possibilities of Bengal through private initiative in inter-Asian trade. French ships from Chandernagore went to Mocha, Manila, Achin, Pegu, Canton and Persia. This French private trade, however, ended when war began between the French and the English and Siraj-ud-daula, departing from the principles of Alivardi, permitted the English to capture Chandernagore.

Bengal was also the resort of merchants from other parts of Asia. Murshid Quli, a Shia muslim, showed the greatest indulgence to the Persians because they belonged to his sect. Hughli became a very important Shia colony in India, where a great number of wealthy Persian merchants settled for the purpose of trade with Persia. The Armenian merchants in Bengal traded mainly in raw silk and cotton piece goods but they carried their cargo in Danish, French, Dutch or English ships. Their



destination was not always Surat and Basra. They were also prominent as inland traders. In the *parwana* which was issued by Nawab Alivardi Khan in the affair of Commodore Griffin's seizure of Armenian ships there was a significant sentence—"These men are the kingdom's benefactors, their exports and imports are an advantage to all men". As their freight ships were supplied by the European nations trading here they were very much dependent on them. Before 1756 there went every season one and in some years two English freight ships from Calcutta to Mocha and Jedda. These ships were generally the property of the Governor and Council for the time being. Trade with Persian Gulf had very much declined on account of disturbances in Persia. Capt. Joseph Price wrote to Warren Hastings in 1776: "There is not a dabbler in mercantile polity but will tell you that formerly great wealth flowed into Bengal from the Gulphs from Europe by the Cape of Good Hope, and even from the New World (as it is called) by the way of the Pacific Ocean, Manila, the Straits of Molucca. All these sources with many others, they say, are now not only blocked up but several public and private drains have been opened by which the wealth formerly imported is let out". (Br. Ms. Add. 29138). The word drain was perhaps used in this context for the first time.

In the Indian market Bengal had a very favourable balance of trade and like the Europeans these merchants from other parts of India had very little to offer except money or bills. In the language of Bolts, "a variety of merchants of different nations and religions, such as Cashmerians, Multanys, Patans, Sheiks, Sunnosys, Poggyahs, Betteas and many others used to resort to Bengal annually in Caffelahs or large parties of many thousands together from different parts of Hindustan, by which the inland importation of bullion always far exceeded the whole importation by sea from Europe and the gulphs of Persia and Arabia" (Bolts-*Considerations* p. 200). Bolts might have exaggerated when he wrote that 'the Inland importation of bullion in Bengal far exceeded the whole importation by sea from Europe and the gulphs of Persia and Arabia', but nobody can deny that the balance of overland trade was very considerably in favour of Bengal inspite of the fact that Bengal was importing cotton from Central India and other places. Luke Sraffton in his *Reflections on the Government of Indostan* corroborates the statement of Bolts. He wrote, "Till of late years incredible number of merchants from all parts of Asia in general, as well as from the rest of Hindostan in particular, sometimes in bodies of many thousands at a time, were used annually to resort to Bengal with little else than ready money or bills to purchase the produce of these provinces". Sraffton wrote in 1763. Obviously the period before Plassey is referred to in this sentence. An old Spanish proverb appropriately said, "He who would bring back the wealth of the Indies must take the wealth of the Indies with him". Traffic in exportable luxury goods in which Bengal specialised did not decline during the years 1740-56 with the decline of the Mughal empire. The princes and princelings who were making themselves independent were trying to imitate the great



Mughals in their miniature durbars and Bengal's muslin, her wrought silk and raw silk were very much in demand in the durbars of Mughal emperors Ahmad Shah and Alamgir II at Delhi, the Nawab Wazir of Oudh, Rohila chieftains and the Nizam. The shrinking of the overland market began sometime after Plassey when the demands of the European market began to dominate the economy of Bengal.

It may be argued that wealth was drained away from Bengal to Delhi in the form of tribute of about a crore of rupees. But Alivardi Khan never paid any tribute to Delhi during sixteen years of his administration after he had paid his *peshkash* and the value of Sarfaraz's escheated property and first year's surplus revenue. After 1740 he sent only occasional presents. The Dutch wrote in one of their letters that in 1749 repeated demands were made for the payment of the annual tribute. Sardar Khan Mewati, a jamadar, was actually sent from Delhi at the head of 500 horsemen to bring the tribute. Alivardi handed over to him the entire amount in coins. He put them in boxes and started for Delhi. When he and his men reached the frontier of Bihar a band of highwaymen suddenly attacked the escort near Sassaram and overpowered them. Sardar Khan Mewati could only save two lakhs by taking flight to Patna. The so-called highwaymen took another route and brought almost the entire amount to Murshidabad. Between 1729 and 1739 the banking house of Jagat Seth sent a considerable portion of the tribute in the form of bills payable from the surplus income of their establishments outside Bengal. The drain of specie to Delhi thus gradually declined between the years 1728-1739 and stopped altogether after 1740. The moderate, firm and vigilant administration of the three Nawabs had added very considerably to the national stock. It is difficult to form an exact estimate of this surplus. It was no wonder that after the victory of Plassey Clive could walk through vaults thrown open to him alone, 'piled on either hand with gold and jewels'. He contented himself with taking only 40 lakhs. Others—Drake, Watts, Killpatrick, Maningham, Walsh, Scrafton, Lushington—had each his share. "The whole of this surplus national stock for sixty years was whisked away to Britain"—(Sarkar—*History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 418)—not the whole. Amir Beg, Ramchand, Nobkissen and other 'blackmen' who helped their new masters had their share of the 'loot of Plassey'—Omichand excepted. He had overreached himself.

The villages in Bengal were grouped into 1660 parganas. These parganas were formed into 34 sarkars in the days of Akbar. Murshid Quli Khan organised them in 13 Chaklas or larger territorial divisions. He was also responsible for some very important changes in administrative principles and practice. He turned assigned lands in Bengal-jagirs into revenue lands-khalsa. He gave these displaced mansabdars jagirs in Orissa. "He employed none but Bengali Hindus in the collection of revenue" (Salimullah). Private favour ran in the channel of Brahmin interest (J. Grant). Bengali hindus were appointed not only to the highest civil posts under Murshid Quli and his successors. They were appointed



even as police and army officers. The officer in charge of Shaukat Jang's artillery was a Bengali hindu. The association of Bengali hindus in the work of administration was not a British innovation. It was the Murshid Quli tradition. This was gradually replaced by the tradition of European agency culminating in the Cornwallis tradition of entire exclusion of Indians. As this was found almost unworkable a new tradition was sought to be created, after a generation, of Indian agency and British superintendence.

Murshid Quli also encouraged the formation of big zamindaris. Under him half of the land revenue of Bengal was paid by six large zamindars. Raghunandan, 'his most trusted counsellor in revenue matters', was encouraged by him to form the big zamindari of Nator by the agglomeration of many separate lapsed estates. It extended over 12,909 square miles and 181 parganas. The Burdwan, Dinajpore and Nadia zamindars received additions to their zamindaris in the same manner. The old chiefships of Birbhum and Bishnupur were allowed to continue as zamindaris. Sri Krishna Chaudhuri, a revenue officer, was encouraged to establish himself in Mymensingh as a big zamindar. Murshid Quli Khan took advantage of rebellion, contumacy, default in revenue payment and death of zamindars without heirs to bring about this agglomeration. The old established zamindars were not crushed out of existence. A sense of insecurity was not created among smaller zamindars. The smaller zamindars and talukdars were still very numerous. The larger zamindaris, in the last years of Alivardi, were altogether 15 in number, covering 615 parganas. 1045 parganas were divided among numerous smaller zamindars and *huzuri* talukdars or renters under zamindars who paid directly to the government. In the Dacca district alone there were 415 such smaller zamindars, in Chittagong 1500.

This administrative policy which encouraged agglomeration was possibly motivated by the following considerations: The bigger zamindars could effectively maintain internal peace and security. They had the means and they could and did organise local police. The Raja of Burdwan's Buxy or officer-in-charge of police had under him *thanadars* who were *chakaran* servants of the zamindar under the Buxy. They furnished merchants and travellers with escorts wherever necessary. Big zamindars could be made chargeable with the loss which travellers and merchants suffered from robbery in districts under them. In the case of smaller zamindars this was not always a practicable proposition. This principle of compulsive local responsibility for law and order relieved the Nawab's government. This responsibility attached to land holding "preserved order at a period when it had full operation". (*G. G. in Council—Revenue—Vol. 92*). The bigger zamindars could afford to advance agricultural loans—*takavi*—to their tenants in case of drought or inundation in a part of their extensive zamindari possessions. Zamindars were also in charge of *poolbundi* or preservation of embankments of rivers. For all this greater dependence could be placed on bigger zamindars. Murshid Quli



Khan must have also felt that it was easier to compel a few big zamindars to observe the regulations of the government. The collection charges were also reduced. The *amils*, who were like collectors under the British, and the *qanungos*, who with their assistants supplied the government a chain of uninterrupted information on land and land revenue, served as effective checks on zamindars, big or small.

Murshid Quli's administration has been regarded as 'a new and illustrious era of finance'. (Grant - *Analysis*). He insisted on regularity of payment. Defaulters, whether revenue officers or zamindars, were punished with great severity. His vigilance was unrelenting. Draconic severity and bestial torture of the defaulters put an end to remissness in revenue collection and payment. He tortured *amils*, who were muslims, and zamindars, who were hindus with equal severity if they defaulted. But for the hindu zamindars the punishment which was calculated to secure maximum effect was conversion to Islam as in the case of Ran Singh, zamindar of Susang. Extirpation was resorted to in the event of rebellion as in the case of Sitaram of Bhusna. But he demanded only the standard revenue—*asal Jumma*.

In 1582 when the revenue system in Bengal was organised by Todar Mal the total land revenue of Bengal was Rs. 10,693,152. In 1700 this *asal Jumma* amounted to Rs. 11,728,541. In 1721 it rose to Rs. 14,109,194. Murshid Quli Khan put an end to all disorder in revenue collection. His attention to detail led to this increase of the standard revenue. He did not depart from established principles, the *qanun* of which the *qanungos* were the interpreters. He himself regarded zamindari property in Bengal as a very secure investment. He bought a zamindari for his grandson Sarfaraz and registered it in the books of the revenue officer. The possession of a zamindari was considered to be permanent and hereditary so long as this stipulated amount which was moderate was regularly discharged. Murshid Quli Khan gave to state income 'permanence and ease of collection'.

This tradition of efficiency in land-revenue collection which was established by Murshid Quli continued under his successors Shuja-ud-din and Alivardi though Shuja-ud-din removed the oppressive agents of Murshid Quli—Naziruddin and Md. Farrash. During Alivardi's administration, at the beginning of the financial year, the "arrears of last year's collection amounting to six or seven lakhs of rupees were brought in bags and placed before the Nawab. If anything remained outstanding from the *amils* and zamindars Jagat Seth, the chief banker of the country, gave his written undertaking to pay the amount". In case of default personal severity was first used towards a zamindar. If this proved to be ineffectual an officer—Sezawal or Wadadar—was sent to realize the revenue. If it was found that the zamindar could not really pay the assessed amount an abatement was given and management was restored to the zamindar. A temporary reduction was made which was restored proportionally by augmentation in succeeding years. No permanent deduction was made.



As variation in the public demand upon the zaminders was small the profits of continued management must have been considerable.

Murshid Quli was, however, responsible for an innovation in land revenue administration. He imposed a subahdari *abwab* or cess upon the zamindars, a fee for the accountants of the khasla or exchequer. The amount was very small—Rs. 2,58,857. His successor Shuja-ud-din's *abwabs* or cesses amounted to Rs. 19,14,075. Alivardi also imposed new cesses amounting to Rs. 22,25,554 of which Maratha Chauth amounted to Rs. 15,31,317. This total revenue demand—*asal* and *abwab*—was not yet burdensome. Though the zamindars passed the burden upon the ryots with additions of their own, there was as yet no great pressure of over-assessment. New resources that had developed during a century and a half had created a sense of well being. The idea of an original rent still took the lead and governed the rates even of *abwabs* or cesses. The zamindar knew that he could be dispossessed only if he withheld the payment of this revenue demand without any valid reason, if he gave protection to thieves and robbers or rebelled against the government. He was, therefore, not disinclined to transfer this sense of security to the ryots. The ryot could claim "continued possession on terms of a reasonable and established payment" (*Home Misc.* 382). There was the *nirik* or customary rent in each area. A sense of security prevailed. There were severity and coercion but the door was not thrown wide open to corruption and chicane.

Zamindaris were not fiefs. The zamindari system was not the means of recruiting fighting men. The peasant was not a serf. There were, however, certain almost permanent inherited relations. But land tenure was not conditional on service except in the case of *chakaran* lands. There were certain feudalistic tendencies in the control of the tenantry by the zamindars. The zamindar collected the rent, policed the zamindari, maintained roads, protected river banks and held a court of 'low justice' for his tenants. In the land-lord-tenant relationship there was a mutuality of rights and obligations. But on account of lack of density the zamindar was possibly at a disadvantage and could not carry things very far, even if he was so inclined. The zamindar was more a patriarch than a feudal lord.

Mughal revenue administration was not a very complicated affair. The amils, who were like collectors in the British period, collected land revenue from zamindars and *huzuri* talukdars from groups of parganas. In certain frontier districts like Purnea, Rangpur and Midnapur there were faujdars or subordinate commanders with zamindars collecting from ryots under them. The amils and faujdars were not stationed in any region for any number of years. But the qanungo's office was there as a permanent, uniform repository of customs and statutes. They kept a register of all changes by sale, transfer, inheritance or otherwise. This permanent office of record was the sheet anchor of the revenue system, a check upon the zamindars as also upon the amils. The amil realized the stipulated revenue and paid it at the khalsa or exchequer at Murshida-



bad. The amil was also responsible for disbursements. Under the amil there were chaudhurs who were small zamindars acting as subordinate collectors. The qanungo's department witnessed the accounts of zamindars, commissions to zamindars, etc., guarded against fraudulent alienations and prevented undue exactions from the ryots. The other officers of this department were mustafis or keepers of accounts and mazumdars or keepers of records. There were two chief or Sadar qanungos. Their dues and allowances were a separate collection in the districts. These offices were hereditary but not so the amils and chaudhurs. The honesty of the officers of this department was the best feature of Mughal administration at its best. The department was manned exclusively by hindus.

Civil justice—'low justice',—was administered locally by the zamindars and zamindari officers. Almost all complicated cases were decided by arbitration. The arbitrators were chosen by the party. Debts and commercial disputes were the main subjects of arbitration. The system of civil justice is best described in the words of Md. Reza Khan: "If the Gentoos would decide amongst themselves by their Brahmins their disputes regarding inheritance and the partition of estates why should they come to the court of the magistrate to complain? But when their disputes cannot be settled by the Brahmins and the heads of their castes they complain to the magistrates from whose decision they cannot deviate". (*India Office—Revenue Progs.—Range 2-Vol. I*). Trials of civil suits in the adalat at Murshidabad could not be many. In such circumstances a litigious spirit could not possibly grow. The machinery of justice from our point of view was very imperfect. There were no regular gradations of courts with definite provisions for appeal. The Daroga-i-adalat-diwani or deputy of the Diwan normally decided important cases of disputes relating to landed property. The Diwan seldom exercised this duty in person.

Murshid Quli Khan, Shuja-ud-din and Alivardi were each of them, Diwan as also Nazim. As Nazim or Supreme Magistrate the Nawab presided personally at the trial of capital offenders. No zamindar was entitled to punish anybody capitally. The muftis expounded the law and the qazis gave the fatwa in criminal cases. The East India Company, as zamindar of Calcutta, was responsible for justice in the faujdari court for the trial of criminal cases, the court of Cutchery for the trial of civil cases and the caste cutchery for caste matters among the hindus. The criminal jurisdiction exercised by zamindars did not extend very much beyond trial for petty offences. It did not, in any case, extend to life or limb. It is relevant to note that in 1732 the Company's servants wanted to increase the rent from each holding in the zamindari of Calcutta. But they received a *parwana* from the Nawab that they were presuming to do something which he himself had not the power to do and if they persisted they would by the laws of the empire forfeit the lands. In 1754 eleven lascars were tried by a court in Calcutta for the murder of an English



captain. Two, who were christians, were executed. The other nine persons, who were found guilty, were muslims. They could not be put to death because the Calcutta Council dreaded the wrath of the Nawab. They were therefore kept in prison in the hope that sickness would take them out of the world. The zamindar or talukdar or one of his officers presided over the caste cutchery. It decided disputes relating to loss of caste or disputes relating to marriages.

In eastern Bengal, in its riverine districts, the maintenance of an adequate police establishment was very expensive for zamindars. The waterways afforded the river dacoits a very easy means of escape. The *nauara* or naval establishment mahals in Dacca and Mymensingh districts authorized a deduction from Jumma for the purpose of supplying boats and boatmen to the government with a view to enabling it to oppose the invasions of the Mughls and for stopping river dacoity. The zamindars had to supply a certain number of well-equipped war boats. In Murshid Quil Khan's time the nawabi *nauara* establishment consisted of 798 armed boats stationed at Dacca to guard against Mugh and Feringhee pirates.

In the first half of the eighteenth century the weavers of cotton piece goods formed the hinge of Bengal's economy. Almost every distinct kind of cloth was the product of a particular district and the proficiency was thus transmitted almost for centuries from father to son. As the greatest part of the province was employed in this manufacture improvements were made in it. "The richest man in the empire affects no other advantage in his dress but that of linen extremely fine" (Orme—*Fragments* p. 410). This was a great encouragement to cotton manufacture. "To the weaver's trade six or seven hands contribute. To get a piece of cotton made by compulsion a man with one or two wives, and five or six children must be taken up and instead of being confined in a narrow room must be placed in a spacious orchard. All this would be very inconvenient. If guards were placed upon a village, which is the only method of compulsion that can be used, the alarm would be taken and half the country by the retreat of these people would be depopulated in a day's time—This manufacture therefore was less liable to outrages than any other trade ; and hence another cause of its improvement" (Orme—*Fragments* pp. 411-413). This manufacture was brought to 'amazing perfection'. But it was in the main a rural domestic industry. There was complete liberty of buying and selling. Restrictions, limitations and prohibitions were not there and interception of profit by middlemen could not be carried too far. There was competition in the best and fullest sense of the term among the buyers. The villages of Dacca, Malda, Santipore and Cossimbazar produced the best varieties of cloth—mulmul, tajib, abroan, nainsook, buddonkhas, sarbuti, terindam, sarkar Ali, jamdami, serhand kani, khasa, calico, etc. Thread was spun by women of all castes in towns as also in rural districts. They spun when they were free from their domestic care. The finest kind of thread came from the spindle and the coarser variety was spun by the wheel. As thread



was spun in the intervals of domestic care it was produced cheaper than any other commodity requiring manual skill.

Silk winding and cocoon growing were next in importance to cotton weaving and spinning. The silk production centres were Cossimbazar, Rajshahi, Jangipur, Kumarkhali, Malda, Radhanagore, Rangpur and Rangamati. Bihar was the principal centre of saltpetre and opium production. Saltpetre being an ingredient of gunpowder was very much in demand among European nations and one of the first fruits of British victory at Plassey was an exclusive grant of saltpetre lands in Bihar to the East India Company. Clive had no difficulty in securing it from Mir Jafar. Salt was manufactured in Bengal along the whole coastal belt. Hijli, Tamruk, Noakhali, Chittagong and the Twenty-four Parganas formed the most important sources of salt supply. On an average more than twenty-five lakhs of maunds of salt were produced of a variety which was described as *punga* or sundried. The Nawabs sought to control this trade, not its manufacture and granted a local monopoly to a favourite or favourites. But a monopoly in those days was never very close because rise in prices led to smuggling and neither the government nor any merchant, even if he was as big as Khwaja Wazid, had the organisation which could ensure a huge monopoly profit. Bengal salt was sold in Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan. Salt trade was confined only to 'native' merchants.

Domination by the Jagat Seth banking house was a very conspicuous feature of Bengal's economic life before Plassey. Eighteenth century was the golden age of the Rajputana bankers. Many of the prominent houses were founded by men who kept military chests of a predatory leader or advanced heavy loans at critical times. This family which migrated from Marwar to Bengal attached itself to Murshid Quli and Manik Lal Saho became Murshid Quli's banker at Murshidabad. Avowed favour of the governing power and undoubted efficiency gradually made this house the centre of commercial credit in Bengal. The French, the Dutch and the English depended very much upon this house for timely loans, sale and purchase of bullion. This house became the receiver and treasurer of government revenues and security for defaulting zamindars. It was in charge of the Nawab's mint. The Seths developed credit and helped international trade. The currency confusion in Bengal was also a source of profit to the house. Sicca rupees in Bengal at the end of three years were described as sonauts. The practice of lowering siccas until they became sonauts placed great power in the hands of the Seths. Land revenue had to be paid in siccas of the current year. Bengal's favourable balance of trade with other parts of India brought to this province a variety of coins in different stages of debasement. The Jagat Seths controlled most of the money-changers and currency confusion was kept under some control. Triennial recoinage in the mints at Dacca, Murshidabad and Patna prevented currency confusion from consolidating to the extent it did in the seventies and eighties of the eighteenth century.



After the recapture of Calcutta in February 1757 the English secured from Siraj-ud-daula the right of establishing a mint in Calcutta. But Calcutta coins could not circulate at par with the sicca coins of Murshidabad perhaps because of the opposition of the Seths. The English had a coin of account, the current rupee, to ascertain the value of all the rest by it. The Jagat Seth house enjoyed great prosperity under Fateh Chand who died in 1744. He was succeeded by Jagat Seth Mahatab Chand and Maharaja Swarup Chand. This house had a hand in the revolutions of 1740 and 1757. But a rapid decline began after Plassey. This house, even in its decline in the middle of the sixties of the eighteenth century, possessed a capital of about seven crores of rupees—'as his countrymen calculate' (Bolts, *Considerations* p. 158). In 1756-57 their capital in circulation and in reserve might have been more than double this amount.

The new rich classes who made money by trade with the Europeans thronged to Calcutta, Chinsura and Chandernagore. Hughli, Murshidabad and Dacca were resorts of country merchants. Trade was brisk. The products of the looms were in great demand. The Nawab's government, in spite of its corruption and inefficiency, saw to it that the foreigners did not misbehave. Readiness of sales and 'diffusion of commerce' encouraged the weavers.

Bernier, who was in India during the years 1656-1668, used superlatives in describing Bengal's fertility. He wrote, "Egypt has been represented in every age as the finest and most fruitful country in the world but the knowledge I have acquired of Bengal during two visits paid to that kingdom inclines me to believe that the pre-eminence ascribed to Egypt is rather due to Bengal" (*Travels* II p. 181). Rennell described Bengal to be 'as fertile as Egypt'. "The soil was luxuriant and agriculture, though not raised by improvements was not also hurt by any blameable neglect or inattention". The peasant tenure was heritable but not transferable by sale or mortgage. Land possessed no market value. Lack of density was of the greatest advantage to the resident ryot. The zamindars were not normally compelled to account for any overplus if they did not carry things too far. They used to grant takavi loans to ryots. The money-lender had not yet a place in rural economy. The zamindars, of course, depended upon loans from them because the Nawab's government insisted on regularity of payment. In the words of Verelst: "the peasant was easy, the artisan encouraged, the merchant enriched and the prince satisfied".

In the Central Secretariat at Murshidabad, in the office of the Diwan of the khasla, successive Diwans—Roy Royans Alamchand, Chin Roy, Biru Dutt, Kirat Chand, Umed Roy—created a tradition of efficiency. Alivardi described Chin Roy as 'no less than my master' (*Seir* II, p. 76). Kirat Chand, son of Alam Chand, who succeeded Biru Dutt on his death, proved "balances against several zamindars and some other persons of high rank but chiefly against Jagat Seth and the Raja of Burdwan. They all confessed and the whole, amounting to one crore some lacs, was paid

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into Alivardi Khan's treasury to his master's great satisfaction, who henceforward reposed an unbounded confidence in him" (*Seir* II, p. 114). Raghunandan, founder of the Nator Raj house, a great favourite of Murshid Quli Khan, had served to create this tradition of efficiency, maintained by Roy Royans from Alam Chand to Umed Roy. Efficiency of successive Diwans of the Khalsa was backed by a very efficient Qanungo daftar. This enabled the Nawabi government to retain its grip on land revenue administration for which Murshid Quli Khan created new traditions.

Villages with their simple wants and little troubles, which could be easily remedied locally by the panchayats or the zamindars and their *amlas*, were conspicuous for their togetherness rather than tensions, a remarkable contrast to later developments in the nineteenth century when litigation became ryots' luxury. But the 'blight of medieval theocratic rule' affected education, literature, society and religion. Education was in a very low state in vernacular schools. In *tols* or colleges of oriental learning only Brahmins and Vaidyas or physicians were allowed to attend. In the *Madrasas* or colleges of Mohammadan learning the state of things was no better. Learning, hindu or muslim, was reduced to memorizing vast masses of ancient lore. There was, however, a profound love and veneration for learning.

There were fantastic perversions of Hinduism. The caste system was there in all its rigidity and lifeless orthodoxy. But all was not 'hideous, grotesque and ignoble'. Those abuses that cried for suppression—thagi, sati, infanticide, kulin polygamy etc.—did not penetrate the society to its core. Was it a decomposed society? The old simple faith had a living hold and this simplicity and piety were very real especially in rural areas. There were many 'Indian customs teeming with poetry and sweetness'. The sacramental note was present always and everywhere. There was, however, much wood that was dead and diseased that had to be cleared away (Radhakrishnan—*Hindu view of Life*) and the inertness which bound society with its spell had to be removed.

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## CHAPTER II

### POLITICAL HISTORY : 1757-72

The English set themselves only a modest programme when they finally made up their mind to overthrow the regime of Siraj-ud-daula. Siraj had proved impossible ; so, he would have to be removed. The English, however, had no plan of controlling the machinery of the new government. The organisation of the government had so long placed constraints on the English enterprise ; but it is probable the English did not go to the extent of believing that the structure of political authority was incompatible with their commercial prosperity. In fact, their commerce did prosper until they found in Siraj an inveterate enemy to their business. Even then the English did not equate the traditional structure of Mughal government in Bengal with the personal despotism of Siraj. Siraj as an individual was to blame for all their troubles. Anyway, whatever the explanation, the plan of making their commerce secure through a control over the political machinery was yet remote from the English thought. We can take the treaty with Mir Jafar (June 1757)<sup>1</sup> as an illustration of our point. The territorial gains from the treaty, all in the vicinity of Calcutta, were small. In the field of commerce, the English did not ask for anything more than their old privileges. The English believed that their commercial position could be stabilised by upholding the treaty with Siraj (February, 1757). Moreover, the recent losses inflicted by Siraj's capture of Calcutta on the Company, its servants and some indigenous merchants were to be made good by Mir Jafar. To prevent a re-emergence of the French as a political power, effective safeguards were provided. All the 'effects and factories' of the French were to be kept by the English. Mir Jafar promised not to allow the French to settle anywhere in the country. A clause forbade the Nawab to make any new fortification near the Ganges below Hoogly. The meaningful promise of the Nawab that "the enemies of the English are my enemies, whether they be Indians or Europeans" appears to be a clever English device to neutralise the French intrigues. Thus it is clear that only in the sphere of relations with the French that the Nawab found his freedom of action restricted. Even this is explainable by the recent French intrigues which the English were prone to exaggerate. The English were understandably worried over the prospect of an alliance of the French with the Bengal Nawab.

But the English soon found that the political control which the treaty with Mir Jafar did not give them was indispensable. The English gradually ceased to be an outsider. They became more and more a political power, with increasing participation in the country's administration. The process was nearly complete by 1772, and it was accompanied





by momentous changes in the nature of the administration, economy and society of the country.

The circumstances in which the English found themselves led them to think in terms of acquiring political power. The new government started to function in an atmosphere of uncertainty. Old allegiances were now mostly dissolved and the new one was yet to take shape. The conspirators against Siraj had no common programme beyond the immediate one of overthrowing Siraj. The indecision of Mir Jafar himself was shown by his utter passivity during the crucial hours of the battle of Plassey. The sense of uncertainty of the English deepened as they found Mir Jafar unequal to the tasks of the new government. The English believed that they risked losing their entire advantage if they allowed things to take shape in their own way.

The plan of directly controlling the administrative machinery was premature. Yet some control was necessary. The English believed that under the circumstances an effective method would be to build up connections with strong men in the state, whose allegiance to the new regime was suspect. The idea was to counteract any opposition from the Nawab by such alliances. For this the English selected Roy Durlabh and Ramnarayan. Roy Durlabh, one of the conspirators against Siraj, was continued as *Diwan* under the new government. His position in the army made him an important force in the state. Immediately after Plassey the primary role of Roy Durlabh was to make a financial settlement between the Company and the Nawab. In the beginning, however, Roy Durlabh was not found an easy tool. He opposed the kind of settlement on which the English insisted. Finding that Roy Durlabh was the man 'through whose office as *Diwan*, all money, bills and patents must pass', the English thought it a folly to antagonise him by tactless dealing. They finally won him over by promising him a share in the spoils. The English had also sound political calculations in forming the alliance with Roy Durlabh. They utilised this alliance in order to maintain their influence in the Nawab's court. The late political change saw a split in the court. The English found it to their interest to form a group in the court attached to them. According to Sraffton, English Resident at the *Durbar*, the English had to strengthen themselves "by forming a party in his (Nawab) own court to be a continual check upon him, a matter by no means difficult in a country where loyalty and gratitude are virtues almost unknown". Roy Durlabh admirably did his job. Mir Jafar suspected that Roy Durlabh had a hand in the antistate rebellions of the zamindars in Midnapur and Purnea. Even Clive did not doubt the factual basis of this suspicion. With increasing hostility of the Nawab, Roy Durlabh drew closer to the English. Mir Jafar considered Roy Durlabh's financial settlement as a piece of manifest perfidy to the state. Mir Jafar complained that the lands assigned to the Company under this settlement yielded much more than one lakh of rupees for which the grant was ostensibly made. The Nawab thought of removing him. Roy Durlabh



sought Clive's protection which Clive readily gave, realising the worth of a firm alliance with Roy Durlabh. Mir Jafar ruefully pointed out to Clive that it was an interference in his domestic policy. Miran, the Nawab's son, was more active in his opposition to Roy Durlabh. The English consent to the removal of Roy Durlabh was a measure of the Nawab's bitterness against him. The English plan thus finally miscarried. But the English influence in the Court had already been made secure, and the absence of Roy Durlabh did not make any appreciable difference in the situation.

Ramnarayan was, in Clive's words, the 'most powerful and beloved governor of Behar'. When such a strong man openly denounced the new regime, Clive had to make up his mind as to the type of policy he should follow in regard to him. Clive himself doubted the earnestness of Ramnarayan in taking resolute measures against the French. But Clive decided to form an alliance with him. Here again the policy, as Sraffton wrote, was to use Ramnarayan as a check on Mir Jafar. Verelst explained much more clearly than Sraffton the importance of this alliance for the security of the Company's possessions in Bengal. The decision to form alliances, Verelst argues, was the result of the conflict with Siraj. The conflict taught the English a lesson: the Nawab must henceforward be rendered incapable of attempting the 'destruction' of the English. The new policy of the Company had to be re-oriented to that need. "This incapacity", Verelst believes, "was happily effected by engagements taken at the desire of Meer Jaffier (this is a misrepresentation) with Ramnarayan, the nawab of Patna and some others. Had this engagement been religiously observed, the English would have stood, like the several nations in Europe, secure, not from their own strength alone, but protected by the irreconcilable interests of all around them"<sup>2</sup>.

Clive was, however, careful that indulgences to the rival groups of Mir Jafar in the state might not result in eliminating the political authority of the Nawab. The fundamental assumption of the Company's strategy of political alliance was that Mir Jafar would continue to rule. The English were not prepared to face the uncertainty in the political situation developing out of the elimination of Mir Jafar. Clive was afraid that this elimination would create a vacuum of which the intriguing French and the ambitious political groups in the country would take advantage<sup>3</sup>. The wisdom of Clive's policy was undoubted. The success of the Company in giving help and protection to Mir Jafar whenever he was in troubles greatly enhanced English prestige and, as a consequence, the English came to acquire a secure hold over the administration.

Mir Jafar started to rule in a difficult situation and the troubles became worse with time. The late political change was unexpected, and Murshidabad was in ferment. Mir Jafar could not feel secure in the city and only the presence of Watts and Walsh could hearten him. The situation became far worse after the murder of Siraj. The sense



of insecurity again drew Mir Jafar close to the English. The English were handsomely rewarded for their support to Mir Jafar in these critical hours of his. Clive used his influence to get Mir Jafar's succession to throne confirmed by the Mughal Emperor. Mir Jafar was again in troubles due to the anti-state rebellions in Midnapur, Purnea and Patna. It is significant to note that the rebellions were led by persons who were attached to Siraj. This gave the rebellions a political colour. Mir Jafar could hardly ignore the rebellions because under the circumstances these could draw other malcontents in the state. The rebel Raja Ramsingh of Midnapur was ordered by Mir Jafar to come down to Murshidabad. The Raja sent his brother, who was imprisoned by Mir Jafar. The Raja protested to Clive against Mir Jafar's action. A settlement was concluded mainly at Clive's initiative. In the case of the Purnea rebellion led by Hazyr Ali Khan and Achal Singh, Clive instructed Mir Jafar to take the field. Mir Jafar succeeded in crushing the rebellion. The invasion of Shah Alam created a more harassing problem for the Nawab, and this considerably helped the English consolidate their position. When the imperial *Vizier* succeeded in murdering the Emperor Alamgir II, Shah Alam, his son, decided to leave Delhi and to try his fate elsewhere. He chose Bengal as the field for gratifying his ambition. He was without a home and political control. This fact lent his activities in Bengal from 1759 onwards an element of adventurism. The intrigues of such a rootless but ambitious prince were more dangerous than the invasion of a settled ruler. For the English the development was highly embarrassing. The development gave the Nawab a pretext to renew his attempts to overthrow Ramnarayan, suspected of being a party to Shah Alam's intrigues. The English were afraid that the removal of Ramnarayan would jeopardise the English interests in Bihar. Moreover, the Nawab's attitude to the invader posed another problem for the English. The timid Nawab was planning to buy off the enemy. Clive believed that such a policy would only serve to encourage the invader. Under these circumstances it was not altogether improbable that Bihar would be finally torn off—an eventuality extremely prejudicial to the English commerce in Bihar. Clive succeeded in persuading the Nawab to face the situation more boldly. Once armed resistance was accepted as the main principle of action, the Nawab could not do without English help. Though the Nawab had not much heart in the matter, he was compelled to agree to Clive's policy of repulsing the enemy by force. The English hold over the Nawab was thus assured. The troubles in the Nawab's army were equally formidable to the Nawab. Discontent in the army due to irregular payment was not a new development of Mir Jafar's first administration. But it became really acute due the exhaustion of the Nawab's treasury after Plassey. The discontent was widespread in the army. The Nawab only bungled the issue by dismissing some prominent men in the army accused of fomenting this discontent. The army retaliated by besieging the Nawab in his palace.



Clive decided to intervene to put an end to the crisis because he was afraid such a feeling of discontent would infect other troops in the country. Even the moderate success in handling such a critical situation enhanced the English prestige.

Thus in different ways the administration of Mir Jafar came under constraint. It would be wrong to assume that Mir Jafar accepted the English intervention in a docile mood. He tried to assert his authority and the restraints placed upon it sometimes exasperated him. When Clive decided to protect Roy Durlabh, the leader of the pro-English faction in the court, Mir Jafar strongly remonstrated to Clive, criticising this action as an improper interference in his administration. In fact Clive could not afford to ignore the bitter feeling of Mir Jafar and the group attached to him against Roy Durlabh. In the case of Ramnarayan, again, Mir Jafar sharply reacted to Clive's decision to protect him. The Nawab tried various means to isolate Ramnarayan from the English. He posted guards round his camp to intercept any communication of his with the English. Clive refused to yield because in this case the English stakes were greater. The support of the semi-independent Bihar regime was the best guarantee for the security of the English commercial interests in Bihar.

Of the problems faced by Mir Jafar some were primarily of a transition period. The zamindars rebelled against a political authority which they could not accept. They tried also to assert their position by taking advantage of the unsettled state of politics. Other problems were causally connected with the late political change. The army troubles had their roots in the Nawab's financial stringency caused mainly by the payment of an enormous amount to the English on various counts. The unusual phenomenon of the assignment of the revenue of extensive territories to the English was an indication of the deepening economic crisis of the state.

This situation, however, was not the result of any conscious plan of the English to control the government. But when the military strength of the Company was the issue, the English did have a conscious plan. The military power of the Company continued to grow and this proved the main prop of the Company's political control in the country. The treaty with Mir Jafar (June, 1757) did not prevent him from increasing his military resources. The only restraint applied to erection of new fortification near the Ganges below Hooghly. Neither did the treaty authorise the Company to add to the number of its soldiers in Bengal. But the English did add to the number. The English decision in this sphere was mainly influenced by two considerations. The first was a feeling that the English could maintain their position in Bengal only by a superior military force. Clive had a cynical distrust about Mir Jafar's integrity. Clive and others wrote of it again and again to justify their plea for increasing the Company's military strength in Bengal<sup>4</sup>. Thus Clive stated his general proposition: "The Moors are bound by no ties of gratitude, and every-day's experience convinces us that Mussulmans will remain firm to the



engagements no longer than while they are actuated by principles of fear, always ripe for a change wherever there is the smallest prospect of success"<sup>5</sup>. The inevitable conclusion from such a premise was that 'the only certain expedient of securing their friendship is by keeping up such a force as will render it unsafe for them to break with us'<sup>6</sup>. Clive was considering the whole question against the background of the political upheaval after Plassey. Thus Clive analysed the new political reality: "The ancient system of politicks is thereby (by Plassey) totally upset. The large extent of country secured by the late treaty will little avail the Company unless it have at the same time enlarged their views. They are now not only to look upon themselves as a trading Company, but as a military Company also possessed of a considerable landed property which can only be maintained by arms"<sup>7</sup>. It is significant to note that in the political philosophy of Clive, military control was synonymous with political control.

The political rivalry of the French was another important consideration. After Plassey the French menace in Bengal diminished in importance. The capture of Chandernagore crippled nearly completely the French political power in Bengal. But so deep-rooted was the English apprehension of French intrigues that they interpreted the fugitive Jean Law's activities in Oudh as a renewed move for restoring French power. They believed that Law was planning an attack on Bengal in collaboration with the Nawab of Oudh<sup>8</sup>. The continuance of the French as a political power in the Deccan was much more disconcerting to the English. Any news that the French in the Deccan had received additional reinforcement from Europe perturbed the English and made them send frantic appeals to the Court of Directors to strengthen the military force in Bengal. A counter-offensive from the French in Bengal was not altogether improbable, since, the English thought, "it will not be possible for the French Company to subsist long without their trade from these provinces"<sup>9</sup>. At one time a French attack was believed so imminent that a proposal was made "to order the zaminders of the country to the southward of Hughley to distress the French as much as lyes in their power if they bring force to Bengal"<sup>10</sup>. Such an attack, however, did not take place. But the French menace nevertheless kept the English on the alert and accounted for the rapid growth of the English army in Bengal.

Circumstances were invisibly transforming the English attitude as to the proper way the Nawab's Government should function, especially when the Company's interests were involved. Immediately after Plassey it was unusual for the Company to think in terms of overthrowing the regime if it had failed to serve the Company's needs. In case of a determined opposition to the Company, such a political programme might have been permissible. But the failure to serve the Company's needs did not necessarily involve any deliberate opposition to the Company, and one need not mix up the two distinct issues. With time, however, such a distinction became unreal, and the new philosophy in politics was not to allow



the regime to continue if it lost its effectiveness to protect and further the Company's interests. The deposition of Mir Jafar illustrates this change in English attitude.

Holwell, Clive's successor as Governor, sought to justify the move to depose Mir Jafar mainly on political grounds. He accused the Nawab of actively encouraging the anti-English intrigues of the Dutch. The feeble measures of Mir Jafar in regard to Shah Alam's invasions of Bengal were interpreted as evidence of Mir Jafar's collusion with Shah Alam with strong anti-English motives. Moreover, Holwell attributed the difficulties of the English to Mir Jafar's misgovernment, and he made the most of the army troubles to present Mir Jafar's government in a lurid light. Holwell's accusations were partly groundless. The view that Mir Jafar was a party to the Dutch intrigues is no longer tenable<sup>11</sup>. It is true the powerful anti-English faction in the Nawab's court was ready to extend to the Dutch the commercial privileges enjoyed by the English with a hope that this would serve to counter-balance the rapid growth of English power in Bengal. But there is no evidence to show that Mir Jafar went out of his way to grant these privileges. Only simple prudence would tell the Nawab that the multiplication of such privileges would place more restraints on his independent authority. There is scarcely any sound evidence to establish the charge that the Dutch brought troops to Bengal with the active connivance of Mir Jafar. In fact the reluctance of the Nawab to grant the kind of privileges that the Dutch asked for exasperated them, and the Dutch invasion was a desperate move to extort the concessions by force. It was Vernet, the Dutch Resident at Murshidabad, who misrepresented the Bengal situation to the Batavian authorities. False hopes were raised by Vernet that Mir Jafar's attachment to the English was growing feeble and that a show of force could complete the rupture between the English and the Nawab. Nothing could have been more encouraging to the Dutch than this. In the case of Shah Alam's invasion, Mir Jafar's preparations to meet the invader undoubtedly left much to be desired. This was probably the result of the Nawab's feeling that he would find it a tough job to drive out the invader, about whose resourcefulness he had erroneous notions. One may blame him for his lack of foresight and for his timidity but it would be wrong to impute a political motive for his failings. Vansittart's suggestion that Mir Jafar refused to cede to the English the district of Chittagong purely out of a hostile feeling for the English<sup>12</sup> is simply ridiculous. The Nawab did not cede the district for the simple reason that the signing away of the revenue of the district would only aggravate the financial crisis he was passing through. Holwell's view that "the country will never be in a settled peaceful state whilst this (Mir Jafar's) family is at the head of it" is more sound. In fact, the Company was finding it increasingly difficult to work within the framework of the existing government.

Holwell, however, did not locate the source of the incompatibility of the existing government with the prosperity of the Company. It was



Vansittart who first made a sober analysis of the various elements of this incompatibility. He pointed to the gradual transformation of the English Company from a 'commercial body, founded on a system of economy' to a 'military and political body'<sup>13</sup>. After Plassey this was an unavoidable process. The English went up in estimation of the 'country' powers. To 'support' this growing influence the English needed a strong army. Vansittart argued: "Nothing but that influence and weight, which we maintain by the largeness of our force, can possibly prevent the well-known designs of the two principal European powers—and to this we may add that the nearer we approach to a peace in Europe, the nearer we are to our danger here".

The problem, however, was to provide resources for maintaining the growing army. At first the idea was to pay out of the Nawab's treasury. The Nawab agreed to pay 1 lakh of rupees per month while the army would be in active operations. The lands round Calcutta, ceded by the treaty with Mir Jafar (Art. 9), yielded a net income of only 5 or 6 lakhs per year. Moreover, the Company held assignments of some portions of Burdwan and Nadia from April, 1758 to April, 1760 as payment of the sums for making good the Company's losses during the capture of Calcutta. But these resources were found inadequate.

The Nawab's failure to pay the stipulated amount made matters worse. Various factors accounted for this failure. The enormous amount that the Nawab had to pay to the English, publicly and privately, as price for his accession to the throne, was a serious drain on his treasury and private accumulations. His recourse to the exceptional measure of assigning the revenues of Burdwan and Nadia in order to pay the amount is an evidence of the acute financial stringency of the government. The Nawab had to spend a lot to put down rebellions in various parts of the country and to repulse Shah Alam's army. The frequent invasions of Bihar by Shah Alam seriously impeded the collection of land revenue. Moreover, the imperfect control over some of the large zamindaris led to a fall in the collection of land revenue. The zamindar of Birbhum was perpetually in a rebellious mood. Vansittart thus described the attitude of the zamindars: "The Rajahs of Bishenpore, Ramgarh, and the other countries, bordering upon the mountains, were ready to shake off their dependence, and had offered considerable supplies to the Beerbhoom Rajah. The Rajah of Curruckpoor had committed open hostilities, and taken possession of all the country about Bouglepoor, which entirely stopped the communication between the two provinces on that side of the river"<sup>14</sup>. Vansittart was prone to exaggerate the internal troubles in the country in order to justify his plea for deposing the Nawab, but it is an incontestable fact that the zamindars did not accept the new regime with good grace. The usual form of resistance to the authority was the refusal to pay revenue. The Nawab was not in a position to compel the zamindars to pay. There is reason to believe that Vansittart did not discourage the zamindar of Birbhum from opposing Mir Jafar's authority, when the



zamindar communicated to him his desire to overthrow the Nawab. The increasing participation of the English merchants in the internal trade of the country caused a decline in the income from the collection of duties on this trade.

The acuteness of the financial crisis was revealed in the first few months of Mir Qasim's administration. According to the author of *Seir* the new Nawab was 'amazed and thunderstruck at the emptiness of the treasury'<sup>15</sup>. Vansittart wrote: "Money found in the treasury none, only gold and silver plate to the amount of two or three lakhs, which is ordered to be coined"<sup>16</sup>. Relentless curtailment of expenses, strict economy in the administration, a large loan from the House of Jagat Seth, confiscation of the property of Chunilal, Manilal and others accused of misappropriation of state-income and a number of other extraordinary measures went only a little way towards solving the financial crisis.

To make matters worse for the Company, the collections from the assigned lands were extremely unsatisfactory. Holwell explained it by the reluctance of the zamindars and the establishment connected with the land revenue collection to co-operate with the English. "The *Roy-Royan*, *Muttasuddis*, *Diwan*, and every harpey employed in the zamindaree and revenues, became implacable enemy"<sup>17</sup>. Vansittart himself was not unaware of the change in the agrarian relations. He believed that the officers employed in the work of collection took advantage of the widening rift between the Nawab and the English to delay remittance of revenue to the Company's treasury<sup>18</sup>. The Company hoped to make up for these losses by getting assignments in Sylhet and Chittagong. Mir Jafar, however, rejected the suggestion on the ground that the measure would result in giving the English 'control' over his people<sup>19</sup>. A further source of difficulty for the English was their failure to make the country merchants accept the *sicca* rupees coined in Calcutta. One of the first measures of the English after Mir Qasim took over was to issue "a very severe order forbidding all the *shroffs* and merchants to refuse the Calcutta *siccas*, or to ask any *batta* on them". The Company could not get any assistance from the Court of Directors because the Calcutta authorities concealed from the Court the reality of the financial situation.

The financial crisis that developed out of these circumstances was alarming and in a meeting of the 7th August, 1760, the Select Committee expressed its grave concern over it. The prospects of the financial year beginning from 1st August, 1760 were bleak. The total estimated amount available for this year was 37½ lakhs of rupees made up of the following items: (a) net balance of 1 lakh in the treasury; (b) 25 lakhs to be received from the Nawab as the full amount of his debt; (c) 8 lakhs to be received from the Company's lands; (d) 1½ lakh from land and sea customs; (e) 2 lakhs from sales in the import warehouse and bills of exchange on Europe. The Company, however, could not rely on the payment by the Nawab. Even if the Company's resources did not fall below the estimate, the Company would have to set apart 18 lakhs of rupees as indispensable



military expenditure and 10 lakhs as contribution to the Madras Council which was desperately in need of money. So only 9½ lakhs remained for the Company's investment. The surplus was scarcely enough to maintain the present volume of Company's investment. On the 6th August, 1760 the Calcutta Select Committee decided that "it will be most for the Company's interest to stop any further advances on account of this year's investment". The dwindling surplus had direct repercussions on the Canton trade and the trade carried on by the Bombay and Madras Councils. The Madras Council, involved in war with the French, was sending frantic appeals to Bengal for financial help. In July, 1760 the Calcutta Select Committee apologised to the Madras Council for its inability to send it<sup>20</sup>.

It was in the shadow of this economic crisis that the Calcutta Council was contemplating a major change in the Bengal Government. That the real issue was economic and not political and administrative was clearly shown by the way the Select Committee sought to solve the crisis. Despite the convictions about Mir Jafar's misgovernment the Company did not yet decide to throw him out. In August, 1760 Vansittart suggested to Colonel Caillaud that he would continue supporting the present administration if the Nawab made over to the Company land worth 50 lakhs of rupees. Vansittart had in mind the cession of Burdwan and Nadia<sup>21</sup>. Doubting the feasibility of the plan the colonel suggested that the Nawab 'can only be frightened into compliance'. It is thus clear that even the sceptical colonel did not look upon deposition as an inevitable course. Even on September 11, 1760 only 16 days before the conclusion of the treaty which raised Mir Qasim to throne, the Select Committee resolved to propose to Mir Jafar to assign the districts. The idea was that the administration could be made useful by some reforms. One is surprised to find the Committee concluding that the Company should not do anything which would ultimately weaken the Nawab. The most desirable course, the Committee believed, would be "to see power removed out of the hands of that sort of men, who now rule and direct his affair and through whose mismanagement and frauds, the country and his administration suffered so considerably, and to have such a share of power invested in the Company as will enable them to prevent the bad consequences of so many contending interests, will effectually put a stop to that dissipation of revenues, which has reduced the Nabob to his present distressed condition"<sup>22</sup>.

The plan of reforming the administration with a view to appropriating a considerable part of the country's revenue was ultimately abandoned. The Company was probably impressed by Mir Qasim's professions of attachment to the English cause and his promise to take measures immediately to relieve the Company's financial distress.

The Company considerably gained by the arrangement with Mir Qasim<sup>23</sup>. Three districts—Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong were ceded to the Company. The English would now participate in half of the *Chunam* trade of Sylhet. The curt expression that "his (Mir Qasim's)



enemies are our enemies and his friends are our friends" was incorporated in the treaty. The pledge of the Company to assist the Nawab with its army was re-affirmed.

The fulfilment of the financial conditions of the treaty involved an enormous effort for Mir Qasim. We have already referred to some of his measures to increase the resources of the state. The drive for maximum revenue necessitated a re-definition of the relationship of the state with the zamindars.

With the abandonment of the plan of reforming the administration, the idea of direct participation of the English in the government became unimportant. The Company needed fresh resources to get over its financial crisis, and Mir Qasim's promise that he would provide them simplified the matter for it. The policy was to avoid, as far as possible, interference in the general administration. As for instance, the Company promised not to allow the tenants of the Nawab's territory to migrate to the Company's land. In the beginning, there was a perfect accord between Mir Qasim and the Company; but circumstances soon arose which embittered this happy relation and before long Mir Qasim had to be thrown out.

Those who seek to explain this overthrow agree in emphasising two facts: the political ambition of the Nawab and the problem of inland trade. The disagreement among them is on the question of relative importance of the two issues. Dodwell concluded that "the English inland trade was not a cause of the ultimate breach between them and the Nawab, but an admirable pretext which he found ready to hand for distressing them"<sup>24</sup>. In his Chapter in the *Cambridge History of India* Vol. V, Dodwell suggests a different interpretation: "the dominating fact of the situation was that the interest of the English and of the Nawab were irreconcilable. There could be no stability in affairs so long as the Nawab fancied himself an independent governor and the English claimed privileges wholly inconsistent with that independence"<sup>25</sup>. This was a position which contradicts the earlier point of view of Dodwell. Nandalal Chatterjee's view agrees with Dodwell's put forward in *Dupleix and Clive*<sup>26</sup>. Both believed that the problem of inland trade was significant only as a part of the bigger question of the Nawab's 'project of emancipation from English control'<sup>27</sup>.

What was being overlooked in this kind of argument is the incontestable fact that such a control was non-existent. So the question of emancipation from the control is altogether irrelevant. Verelst is primarily responsible for the view which Dodwell, Dr. Chatterjee and others upheld. Verelst made a distinction between the 'immediate' and the 'real' cause of the conflict. The immediate cause was the inland trade but the real cause was the Nawab's political ambition. "It was impossible that Meer Cossim should rest the foundation of his government upon our support. Self-defence taught him to look for independence"<sup>28</sup>. Contemporary observers mixed up things, and were prone to ignore the vital distinction between the private interests of the Company's servants and the interests



of the Company as a corporate concern. Not a single complaint was heard that the Nawab ever sought to resume the assigned districts, to question the right of the English to enforce with an unprecedented rigour their monopoly trade in saltpetre and to purchase *chunam* from Sylhet. The Nawab only opposed an unlimited extension of the inland private trade. But this opposition was interpreted as an opposition to the Company's interest. Verelst himself admitted that "a majority of the Council viewed with jealous eyes every act of government. They considered all resistance to the privileges they claimed, as a settled determination to subvert the power of the Company ; and passion thus uniting with interest, they urged a measure of national policy with the little peevish petulance of a personal quarrel"<sup>29</sup>.

We should examine the factual basis of the view that the political ambition of Mir Qasim caused all the troubles. Verelst believed that the reorganisation of administrative bureaucracy was entirely motivated by anti-English feeling. He chose the Ramnarayan affair as an illustration. It is preposterous to relate Ramnarayan's removal to Mir Qasim's project of emancipating himself from English control. It is strange that Verelst ignored the very simple explanation of the removal. Desperately in need of money Mir Qasim had to reorganise his finances. Ramnarayan's present position in Bihar was incompatible with the success of such plan. As a Deputy Governor of Bihar, Ramnarayan had so long enjoyed an unlimited control over the Bihar finances. Finding that a large amount was due from him, Mir Qasim asked him several times to submit his accounts. His replies were evasive. Even Vansittart became increasingly bitter against Ramnarayan, though in the beginning of Mir Qasim's rule, he was no less enthusiastic than any other Englishman in protecting Ramanarayan, who was looked upon since Clive's time as the main support of English influence in Bihar. The removal of Ramnarayan was, after all, a vital administrative necessity. Even the political considerations behind the removal had nothing to do with the alleged anti-English designs. Mir Qasim knew well Ramnarayan's political views. He did not gracefully accept Mir Jafar's accession to power and it was only Clive's intervention which saved him from Mir Jafar's wrath. Clive's protection naturally encouraged Ramnarayan's pretensions to arrogate to himself the powers of an independent ruler. His loyalty to Mir Qasim was as such hesitant. Mir Qasim interpreted Ramnarayan's temerity to refuse submission of accounts as an evidence of his political ambition. The situation became far more alarming as a result of Ramnarayan's alliance with Major Carnac and Colonel Coote who made no secret of their anti-Nawab feelings. Mir Qasim concluded that Ramnarayan must have to be destroyed if he had to rule with honour. Ramnarayan was not a scapegoat in the alleged attempt to destroy English influence and power. His removal only indirectly led to a decline of English influence. Yet many historians, following Verelst, have confused logic with prejudice. Verelst interpreted the reorganisation of army by Mir Qasim as a move for independence.



Such an interpretation is hardly more tenable than the one we have examined. The treaty concluded with Mir Qasim did not place any restraint on Mir Qasim in this sphere. The English did not question his right to modernise his army. There is no evidence to prove that the real motive of the Nawab in this case was the destruction of English power. Such a suggestion seemed ridiculous to Vansittart who knew intimately the real state of affairs. The pace of modernisation, Vansittart pointed out, was surprisingly slow, and the first project for which the Nawab used his new army was the conquest of Nepal. For anyone pursuing consistently the policy of restraining English power such a plan of conquest was wantonly extravagant. Had the Nawab been determined to destroy English influence, it was foolish of him to dissipate his resources in such a way<sup>30</sup>.

In fact until the question of inland trade generated bitterness between the Nawab and the English, such allegations about Mir Qasim's political ambition were only rarely heard. Rumours that the Nawab had been planning to destroy the English owed their origin entirely to the irresponsible talks of Ellis, Carnac and Coote, Company's top-ranking officers in Bihar, who did not conceal their anti-Nawab feelings. They openly talked of overthrowing Mir Qasim and made the most of some extracts from the Court of Directors' despatches to Bengal which questioned the wisdom of bringing in Mir Qasim as the Nawab. The contents of the letter were assiduously propagated by them. But this hostile faction could not perceptibly influence in the beginning the formulation of policy. The consultations at the time seldom recorded an opinion betraying a distrust of the Nawab's intentions.

It was the inland trade question which ultimately generated the crisis. Almost all the members of the Council widely participated in the inland trade. Hence the public and private interests of the Company tended to overlap.

Inland trade was defined by Vansittart as 'the trade from place to place in the country, in the articles of the produce of the country'<sup>31</sup>. The English servants claimed that the *Farman* of 1717 allowed them to carry it duty free. The Bengal Nawabs from Murshid Quli onwards did not accept this interpretation of the *Farman*. The Court of Directors themselves questioned the legality of the English claim<sup>32</sup>. Clive held a similar view<sup>33</sup>. Before Plassey, as Verelst observed, the privilege of duty-free inland trade was 'enjoyed rather from connivance than of right'<sup>34</sup>. Thus Verelst wrote of the situation after Plassey: "the trade of the servants increased with the authority of the Company, and they now engaged, at first sparingly, in the land traffic of salt. Some even claimed an exemption from duties, but as these pretensions were dis-countenanced by Colonel Clive during his Government, such claims were at times relinquished"<sup>35</sup>. Clive, however, could only imperfectly control the free traders. Animated by a sense of power, they threw to the wind all principles of propriety. The ineffectiveness of Mir Jafar's government in the remote parts of the



country encouraged their pretensions. But some duties were still paid. As for instance, the traders of Luckypora Factory paid a duty of 15 p.c. on the prime cost of salt and 10 p.c. on the prime cost of tobacco<sup>36</sup>. But the English traders sought, whenever possible, to enlarge the scope of duty-free trade. Numerous factories sprang up and the English servants traded in more and more commodities. Mir Qasim thus wrote to Vansittart: "In every *pargunnah* and every village they have established ten or twenty new factories . . . . In every factory, they buy and sell salt, betelnut, *ghee*, rice, straw, bamboos, fish, gunnies, ginger, sugar, tobacco, opium and many other things"<sup>37</sup>. The trade, however, did not remain confined to the English. Finding it futile to carry on inland trade in the face of the free traders' offensive, a large group of indigenous traders, like the Armenians, started to collaborate with the English traders as junior partners. Not less significant was the participation of the Indian agents (*gomastahs*) of the Company's servants. Ignorant of the customs and practices relating to trade, the English found these agents indispensable in some cases. In not a few cases, the loans from the *gomastahs*, themselves traders in some cases, enabled the servants to start their trade. The agents did independent business if they 'found it expedient to purchase the name of any young writer in the Company's services'<sup>38</sup>. With the growth of English influence in the interior, anybody wishing to make ready fortunes gave himself the air of an English agent<sup>39</sup>.

The trade carried on by all these various agencies was in fact not a simple duty-free trade. The duty-free trade was by itself an ample means of buying cheap in an otherwise competitive market. Not content with this, the traders devised methods to buy still cheaper. The Nawab wrote to Vansittart: "They forcibly take away the goods and commodities of *reiat*s, merchants etc. for a fourth part of their value; and by ways of violence and oppression, they oblige the *reiat*s, etc. to give five rupees for goods which are worth but one rupee"<sup>40</sup>. In all these transactions the *gomastahs* were extremely useful. The recent change in the method of investment from contract with the merchants to contracts with the manufacturers and producers had already made the *gomastahs* more powerful than before<sup>41</sup>. About these *gomastahs* Mir Qasim wrote: 'whenever a *gunge* or *golah* has been established they act as zamindars, talookdars and renters'<sup>42</sup>. The private traders could now utilise this powerful instrument.

Such a development in inland trade was disquieting to the Nawab. The situation tended to grow far worse when the indigenous traders, to prevent being undersold, were adopting artifices to avoid paying the duties. The Nawab estimated the yearly loss of income from duties at 25 lakhs a year<sup>43</sup>. The methods of trade indirectly affected the normal collection of land revenue. The peasant-producers, abandoning in some cases the production of salt, tobacco etc., found it increasingly difficult to pay their rent, since their resources declined.

The Nawab viewed with concern the fall in the state income precisely when he was desperately in search of more resources. Moreover, he could



not afford to ignore the distress and sufferings of the country merchants and the common producers. The Nawab himself wrote of the plight of the Kashmir merchants who had so long advanced money at Sunderbans to the salt-manufacturers but were now dislodged by the English private traders<sup>44</sup>. The Armenian merchants who had a large share in the inland trade and held important posts in the state grew more and more clamorous against the free traders. The Armenians had already been bitter about the recently established English monopoly in the saltpetre trade of Bihar. Now they did not accept without protest a fresh invasion on their rights. The Nawab risked losing his face if he failed to redress their grievances.

The Nawab was as much worried over the political implications of the development. The methods of the English traders constituted a menace to the maintenance of his political authority. The methods by which the traders brought and sold commodities involved an application of force. The traders were of course resisted by various indigenous groups. The farmers who collected duties at the *gunges*, the merchants who found themselves hopelessly undersold, the basic producers who were deprived of their expected surplus, the smaller landholders who felt the impact of the new economy in diverse ways and similar other groups sought in their own way to fight back the free traders' offensive. The result was often serious conflicts and breakdown of law and order. In such cases of conflicts, the English factories, often disdainful of the local courts, took law into their own hands. The affront was much more than the Nawab could put up with. The question of inland trade thus tended to develop into a political issue.

One gets an idea of the free traders' notions about their rights from negotiations over the settlement of the inland trade question. Having received a report from Mr. Hastings (who was sent on a deputation to the Nawab in March, 1762) on the extensive abuses in inland trade, Vansittart, promised the Nawab all possible assistance to set matters right. He even suggested application of force, whenever necessary, to stop the misdeeds of the English traders and their *gomastahs*. These verbal assurances were followed up by a set of regulations which were based on some assumptions<sup>45</sup>. The *Farman* of 1717, Vansittart argued, did not give the English the privilege of duty-free inland trade. But since the English had been carrying on such a trade for long, it would be unrealistic to ask them to forego their gains. The main principle of Vansittart's regulations was to admit the English traders to a share in the inland trade, provided they paid the usual duties and accepted the Nawab's ultimate authority in the settlement of disputes about the trade. The only legal *dastak* would be the one issued by the Nawab, and without it the merchandise of the English would be confiscated. The duty was fixed at 9 p.c. on the prime cost of commodities.

Vansittart believed that his plan would be acceptable to the English traders, since it sought to legalise an illegitimate trade. But he brought a hornet's nest about his ears. The free traders sent up a howl and



accused him of sacrificing their rights. The Nawab's hastiness in enforcing the regulations only made matters worse. The character of the free traders' reaction to the regulations is well worth examination. The two most disagreeable features of the regulations related to the payment of duty and the question of jurisdiction over the *gomastahs* in cases of disputes. Surprisingly enough, the traders agreed to pay some duties. But the idea of restoring the Nawab's authority over their *gomastahs* seemed to them abominable. It was a widely held opinion among the members of the Council that such a restoration need to be examined<sup>46</sup>. Major Carnac's view that the restoration would simply amount to 'acknowledging a dependency on the country government, the deliverance from which he (Carnac) had ever regarded as the greatest happiness resulting from our first revolution'<sup>47</sup>, formulates a political philosophy which is significant in so far as it shows the temper of some senior officers. Of the 'numberless grievances' against the local courts, only one or two were precisely stated. One was the obligation to pay to the Court  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the money recovered from the accused. But, as Cartier pointed out, it was common for all and by no means a device affecting the English alone. The 'country' courts had their faults, but these alone did not create all the troubles for the English. As a junior servant of the Company at the silk *aurungs* 'at a time when we were subject to the most lavish dependence on the government', Hastings had very little obstruction to face from these courts<sup>48</sup>. To him the explanation of the complaints about the 'moorish laws' was very simple. He observed: ". . . . if our people, instead of erecting themselves into lords and oppressors of the country, confine themselves to an honest and fair trade, and submit themselves to the lawful authority of the Government, they will be everywhere courted and respected"<sup>49</sup>. The illegitimate trade involved coercion, and the *gomastahs* were the instrument of this coercion. The subjection of the *gomastahs* to the Nawab's authority would, therefore, weaken the foundation of the illegitimate trade. Mr. Cartier believed that the subjection would result in the "commencement of our declining influence in the country"<sup>50</sup>. According to Mr. Marriott, the subjection "must take from us that sway we ought to have in the country, without which no business will be able to be carried on", and 'must make us esteemed very light in the eyes of the generality of people and . . . . be the means of depriving our *gomastahs* of the influence necessary for carrying on the least business'<sup>51</sup>. The ultimate result of the change, according to Mr. Johnstone, would be "the entire loss of that credit and pre-eminence we have ever maintained"<sup>52</sup>. The maintenance of the duty-free inland trade was thus inseparable from the necessity of retaining the institution of *gomastahship*, functioning independent of the Nawab's authority. The right to such a trade was thus much more than a simple economic right.

As a result of the opposition of the Council, the regulations proposed by Vansittart could not come into force. The Nawab, however, did not yield to the opposition and authorised the local officers to suppress,



wherever possible, the frequent clashes between them and the English. This was the background of the Nawab's decision to abolish all duties, though he intended it to be an experimental measure for two years. Mir Qasim believed that this would eliminate the sources of local conflicts, which had been convulsing the country. Moreover, the recent spate of violence brought all legitimate trade to a standstill. The income of the state from duties dwindled to insignificance. In fact, the collection at the *gunjes* was scarcely enough to pay for the maintenance of the local check-posts<sup>53</sup>.

The pretensions of the free-traders were revealed when they questioned the Nawab's right to take such a measure pointing out that the proper authority in this case lay with the Emperor. The traders got panicky over the implications of the measure. They would have to work now in a more competitive market than before. Once they lost their usual differential advantage, the main support of their trade would weaken. The duty-free trade enabled them to attract almost the entire trade. The indigenous traders, now rid of the discriminatory duties, were better equipped to compete favourably with the English traders in the buyers' market. A higher price could now be offered to the producers for their commodities. Once the English traders had lost their semi-monopolistic control, they could not buy cheap any longer. As a result, the prices of commodities purchased by the English tended to rise.

Alarmed at this development, a section of the English traders saw in war the only way of getting rid of Mir Qasim. To create an atmosphere of war, they circulated all sorts of rumours to convince others that the Nawab was determined to exterminate the English. One such rumour had it that the Nawab had issued orders to root out all mulberry and cotton plants in order to destroy the Company's trade<sup>54</sup>. The stiff attitude of the English Council was reflected in the instructions of March 28, 1763 to Amyatt and Hay, deputed to carry on negotiations with the Nawab. They re-stated, only in a stronger language, the well-known point of view of the private traders. The recent order abolishing all duties would have to be called off. A duty of 2½% would be paid only on salt. They insisted on the immediate solution of the currency problem. The Nawab would henceforward strike only one species of rupees. The deputation would get him to issue 'peremptory order' to the *shroffs* and others forbidding them to molest the English traders by their exactions. The Nawab found the scheme of solution unacceptable. The final showdown was inevitable.

It is unhistorical to isolate the question of the assertion of sovereign rights by the Nawab from the wider question of private inland trade. Later the Company itself had to admit that the inland trade caused the conflict with Mr Qasim. Clive had to agree with the Court of Directors that the inland trade had been 'the foundation of all the bloodshed, massacres and confusion which have happened of late years in Bengal'<sup>55</sup>. It was also admitted that the methods of English trade were incompatible



with the maintenance of the Nawab's sovereign authority. Verelst thus described the impact of the trade on Mir Jafar's second government: 'If the country government had been oppressed before, it was now annihilated'<sup>56</sup>. According to Gray, Resident at Maldah, the 'influence' of the government had been "torn to pieces by a set of rascals, who in Calcutta walk in rags, but when they are sent out on gomastahships, lord it over the country, imprisoning the ryots and the merchants . . . ."<sup>57</sup>. Clive was only repeating the complaints of Mir Qasim when he wrote to the Court: "The whole trade of Bengal has, I find, been monopolised by your servants, their agents and gomastahs. Thousands of the natives are starving for want of those accustomed profits, which are now diverted and confined to one particular channel"<sup>58</sup>. The only difference was that the abuses were seen on a much vaster scale.

The attitude of the Company as to the desirable form of political authority in Bengal underwent a striking change in all these years of tension. The entire period of conflict enriched the Company's understanding of the political reality. Some members of the Council were now extremely fond of talking in terms of assuming direct political authority as the ultimate remedy for the recent anomalies. Watts believed that "the best method would be taking of the government into our own hands, on account of the Company"<sup>59</sup>. The principle was found acceptable by Marriott and Cartier<sup>60</sup>. With all their enthusiasm to propound a new doctrine, the members could not afford to ignore the hazards of such a step. Fresh conflicts would result from this, and the Company with its limited military resources would be unequal to the task. A direct Government, it was so concluded, would be ultimately self-defeating. Under these circumstances, the only other alternative was to choose a Nawab who would be totally submissive to the Company's will. Marriott laid down the formula: 'There appears no medium can be observed; for we must either govern him, or he will us'<sup>61</sup>. There was no more any doubt regarding 'the evil consequence of suffering an over-growth of power in a nabob'<sup>61</sup>. It was believed that the selection of Mir Jafar as the new nabob would serve Company's purpose. Marriott argued: "the late nabob's weak capacity, that was made an argument against him, I think would, consistent with good politics, rather plead in his favour, as it certainly can never be the Company's interest to have an enterprising nabob, for the subah of the provinces"<sup>62</sup>.

Even without assuming political authority, the Company got nearly all it wanted from Mir Jafar<sup>64</sup>. Mir Qasim's order abolishing the discriminatory duties on the indigenous merchants was called off. The duty-free inland trade of the English was legalised. The only exception was salt for which 2½% duty would be paid. The Company got the right to purchase half of the saltpetre of Purnea. The *chunam* production of Sylhet would be jointly controlled by the Company and the Nawab. The Nawab's decision to allow the rupees coined in Calcutta 'to pass in every respect equal to the *Siccas* of Moorshedabad,, without any deduction of *Batta*'



removed an important source of the recent anomalies in the Company's financial transactions. The cession of the three districts—Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong was confirmed.

The political credo of non-interference did not apply to the military sphere. The Company was determined to reduce the military strength of the Nawab. The first draft of the treaty (July 6, 1763) reduced the army to 6,000 horses and 12,000 foot. The Nawab was, however, allowed to maintain 12,000 horse by the ratified treaty (July 10, 1763). The war with Mir Qasim was imminent and the Company thought it imprudent to antagonise the Nawab by any rigidity over the military issue. Moreover, the stipulation that the English would be informed of the Nawab's decision regarding the places where he would hold his Court and that an English resident would stay in the Court "to transact all affairs" between the Nawab and the English gave the English some control over the administration. Under the existing circumstances, however, the profession of non-interference was superfluous. The regime was the result of the most conspicuous form of interference, and it would continue functioning only if the privileges of the English were not invaded again. In the military sphere, the English control was visibly growing. It was the less spectacular financial transactions which clearly demonstrated how much the Nawab had to depend on the Company's will. Amidst all these, Mir Jafar looks a pathetic figure, trying to assert himself again and again, but frustrated as often by the overweening self-confidence of the English. The financial pressure had laid him prostrate. The point need to be emphasised. The historians treat it merely as a moral issue and overlook its political implications. The Nawab agreed to pay thirty lakhs of rupees 'to defray all the expenses and loss accruing to the Company from the war and stoppage of their investment'. The amount to be paid to make good the private traders' losses was not specified. None knew better than Mir Jafar himself the actual state of the country's finances. His inability to satisfy the Company's financial demands cost him his throne three years ago. The situation in which he now found himself was far worse. Mir Qasim had in the mean time signed away the revenues of three districts. The income from duties on land trade had further declined. Mir Jafar knew well that he was signing an unworkable contract. In fact, the entire arrangement was imposed upon him. Mir Jafar agreed to it because he preferred the vainglory of Nawabship, whatever its worth, to the prospect of sinking into obscurity.

It took the Nawab only a few months to realise the utter absurdity of the late arrangement. Even till January 1764 he could not scrape together enough resources to pay more than four lakhs of rupees. The English immediately reacted by a threat to deny him protection from his enemies. The Nawab had to yield. The settlement over the compensation for private losses was yet another occasion demonstrating the helplessness of the Nawab. The amount of compensation was unspecified and the English took full advantage of it. The Nawab was asked to pay



twenty lakhs of rupees. Believing that the private losses were exaggerated, the Nawab wanted a statement of their losses. The English promised it but wanted the Nawab to pay the amount in advance. The Nawab's contumacy to pay brought upon him a retribution. He now found the demand inflated to forty lakhs. The Nawab's suggestion for paying the amount in five instalments was turned down. The English did not stop even at that and demanded eight lakhs more. The Nawab wanted this business postponed till the arrival of Clive for the second time. But he had to yield. The Nawab was asked again to pay twenty-five lakhs as donations to their navy. The Nawab paid it. His exasperation to meet a fresh demand on this account brought this angry retort from Vansittart : 'if you do not consent, we know how to manage it'. That the Nawab could be cowed by similar threats clearly reveals the extent of the English hold over the administration.

The financial pressure can largely be attributed to the war situation. Mir Qasim was not fighting alone and was actively assisted in his war efforts by Shah Alam and Shuja-ud-daula of Oudh. Thus while the war was dragging on, the English could not afford to be soft to Mir Jafar.

With the defeat of the combined powers in the battle of Buxar (October, 1764) the major preoccupation of the English in the first year of Mir Jafar's second administration ceased. The English had now to tackle other problems as they cropped up. Surprisingly enough, the fundamental issue of the late conflict—the private inland trade—gradually lost its importance. While the war continued it naturally receded into the background. After the war was over it lost much of its importance as a political issue. The old incompatibility between this trade and the preservation of the country's law and order manifested itself again, and the Company could not afford to overlook it now. Mir Jafar's complaints about the abuses in the sphere of inland trade were no longer disrespectfully ignored. Clive was probably the first Englishman in Bengal to analyse the alarming implications of this question for the Company's administration in Bengal. His own share in the trade may lead one to believe that his plea for replacing the existing system under the control of a motley group by one of monopoly control was motivated by selfish considerations. Such a surmise is not far wrong. Clive's originality lay, however, in the exposition of the point of view that the private inland trade was a menace to the Company's public affairs as much to the country government. The trade did not directly injure the public investment of the Company since it did not include the articles of inland trade. Still the preoccupation of a large number of Company's servants with their trade was naturally inconsistent with the system of control necessary for procuring the full quantity of one public investment. After the introduction of the system of direct advances to the producers, constant alertness on the part of the commercial residents was a necessary precondition of commercial success, particularly in view of the Dutch and French competition in the field.



Much more serious were the consequences for the Company's administration as a whole. Often did Clive emphasise the gradual transformation of the Company from a body of traders into a body of administrators, and he viewed the question of inland trade against this perspective. Concerned primarily with the maintenance of discipline and order, Clive found the inland trade a menace precisely to this system of order. Clive attributed the prevailing confusion in the Company's affairs to the 'spirit of independency' bred in the servants by fortunes from this trade<sup>66</sup>. Clive found in the beginning of his second administration "individuals so suddenly enriched, that there was scarce a gentleman in the settlement who had not fixed upon a very short period for his return to England with affluence"<sup>67</sup>. It frightened Clive to find that the 'independency of fortune' had even corrupted the army. Such a mood, Clive believed, 'is always averse to those duties of subordination which are inseparable from the life of a soldier'. He was convinced that a government 'continued upon such a plan' would not long 'subsist'<sup>68</sup>. Henceforward the private inland trade question ceased to influence Bengal politics.

Other issues arising out of the war left more lasting traces on Bengal politics. The overthrow of Mir Qasim resulted in the consolidation of the political system that the English created. The defeat of Shuja-ud-daula of Oudh and Shah Alam posed problems which required cautious handling. When Mir Qasim finally went off the scene, Shah Alam whose showing was all along poor considered it prudent to surrender to the English. Political and economic considerations made the English willing to make an ally of Shah Alam. An alliance with Shah Alam would convincingly disprove the enemy propaganda that the English were bent on destroying the muslim power in India—a propaganda the Nawab of Oudh had had recourse to for winning allies. The economic motive was to shift on to Shah Alam a portion of the war expenses.

The real gain from this alliance was the acquisition of *diwani*. The English had earlier rejected, out of predominantly political considerations, the offer of *diwani*. In 1758 the Court of Delhi, impressed by the spectacular success of the English in Bengal, thought of "appointing the President (Clive) the collector" of the revenue due from Bengal<sup>69</sup>. Such a right, which did not give the English any control over the utilisation of Bengal revenue, was much less substantial than the one conferred in 1765. Despite his belief that "such a dignity . . . . would give extraordinary weight to the Company in the Empire which nothing could be able to remove", Clive rejected the offer on the ground that the English risked antagonising the Nawab who would resist the change directly affecting his own political authority. Such an opposition could develop into an active hostility, and the English with their small force were not equipped to meet this eventuality. The English rejected the offer again when it was renewed after Buxar. They believed that the time was not opportune for its acceptance. The Nawab of Oudh, still actively hostile against the the English, did not give up hope of winning over Shah Alam. In view



of this uncertainty, the English were afraid that the payment to Shah Alam from Bengal revenue, which formed a part of the proposed *diwani* arrangement, would ultimately result in strengthening the enemy<sup>70</sup>. With the crumbling of Oudh's resistance such an apprehension died away. The change in the political scene was quite reassuring, but it was predominantly economic calculations which led the English to agree to the *diwani* arrangement. In view of the enormous expansion of the English military force during the war with Mir Qasim, the English felt more acutely than ever before the need for larger economic resources. Further assignments out of the country's revenue seemed to the English the only way out of the financial stringency<sup>71</sup>. On 26th November, 1764 they wrote to the Court of their inability to finance the usual investment if matters did not improve. Under these circumstances the offer of *diwani* came as a god-send to the English.

From now on the English got a control over the utilisation of the entire surplus revenue of Bengal after paying Rs. 26 lakhs as yearly tribute to Shah Alam and a little over 53 lakhs annually to the Bengal Nawab. So far as the financing of the Company's investment was concerned, a new epoch was being introduced. The inflow of silver from Europe was ceasing altogether since the Bengal revenue was quite adequate for the entire investment of the Company. The political implications of the change were significant. The last traces of the sovereign authority of the Bengal Nawab were now blotted out. Clive boasted that after the *diwani* the Company became "the spring which, concealed under the shadow of the Nawab's name, secretly gives motion to this vast machine of government"<sup>72</sup>. The Nawab lost all control over the treasury and he had to be content with a fixed allowance. The immediate consequence, as Clive believed, was that "revolutions are no longer to be apprehended; the means of effecting them will in future be wanting to ambitious Mussulmen"<sup>73</sup>.

Historians should, however, guard against any overestimation of the significance of the *diwani* and need not accept uncritically Clive's verdict. In 1773 Hastings ridiculed the entire business of Shah Alam, who was only a protege of the English, conferring the right of *diwani* on the English. He maintained that it was the military might of the English which gained them the right. The claim was perfectly justified. One should not isolate the *diwani* from the wider phenomenon of the increasing consolidation of English power in Bengal. The right to *diwani* followed as a matter of course from the prior process of reducing the Bengal Nawab to a nonentity in the Bengal administration. The authority of the Nawabs had already dwindled to insignificance after Mir Qasim's overthrow. The treaty of February, 1765 with Najm-ud-daula<sup>74</sup> drove the last nail to the coffin. It deprived the Nawab of all control over military affairs. Moreover, he had to transfer the ultimate political authority to Muhammad Reza Khan, appointed as the deputy nawab. Since Reza Khan was merely a tool in the hands of the English, they could control the machinery of government in all vital affairs. The Nawab could not appoint or remove any



officer in the revenue department without the prior consent of the English. Clive's letter of 10th April, 1765 from Madras to the Chairman of the Company in England, shows his clear comprehension of the existing political reality. The conclusion he arrived at was that "we must indeed become the nabobs ourselves in fact, if not in name, perhaps totally so without disguise". The signing away of the revenue of Bengal by Shah Alam was an exceptional measure ; but the English would not probably have waited for long if this generous measure had not come of itself. The move for securing further assignments out of the country's revenue was already under way. If the Nawab had been reluctant, the English would have compelled him. The imperial measure gave this inevitable process a certain amount of grace.

Out of the wars with Mir Qasim another political alliance emerged, that is, the alliance with the Nawab of Oudh. The settlement of terms with him was an embarrassing business for the English. Once the idea was to blot out Oudh from the map of India by portioning it out among different powers. Spencer, the Governor, looked upon such a measure as a piece of expert showmanship and believed that the demonstration of English power in this case would in future discourage the country powers from trying strength with the English. In concluding a settlement with the Nawab of Oudh Clive, however, had worked on a different assumption. To him it was an integral part of the wider question of safeguarding the Company's Bengal possessions. Clive himself denied the existence of any 'generous principle of attaching him (the Nawab of Oudh) for ever to our interest by gratitude'<sup>75</sup>. He had no pretence either of making a virtue of necessity. The problem-ridden Governor was only anxious to avoid further commitments in a newly annexed territory. It is interesting to note that his forecast of what would probably happen in Oudh was much coloured by his experiences in Bengal. Since he believed the English servants would not behave differently in Oudh, it would fast become after annexation a scene of 'oppressions and innumerable abuses'. Clive was afraid that such abuses 'must have laid the foundation of another war'—an eventuality which it was the interest of the Company to avert. The Court of Directors opposed the plan of annexing Oudh on political grounds, though their notions about the current India politics were somewhat mistaken. The Court exaggerated when they wrote that the annexation would be "breaking down the strongest barrier against the Afghans, Morattas, and all the invaders of the Empire who were checked from penetrating into the eastern provinces by a power so respectable as his was throughout Indostan"<sup>76</sup>. The concept of Oudh as a buffer state appealed as much strongly to Clive. He only took care to make the alliance with Oudh as much useful as possible from that standpoint. The restoration of the Nawab to his dominions was not an act of unalloyed generosity. Clive attached some strings to the alliance, the most important one being the obligation on the part of the Nawab to render gratuitous military assistance to the Company in case of war or invasion, and to pay





for any service rendered to him by the Company in similar circumstances. Oudh thus became much more than a buffer state. The English were in a position to control the use of the state's military resources.

The second administration of Clive saw the emergence of a definite political system consisting of what was considered the most desirable form of relationship with the Bengal Nawab and a pattern of alliances with some important powers in the country. In his last political testament<sup>77</sup> Clive stressed the need to preserve the pattern and to eschew any kind of ambitious foreign policy. He argued that the move for further annexation would create troubles which, considered from the standpoint of the consolidation of English power in India, were not worth taking. His assumption was that the real foundation of English power was the Bengal possessions. All commitments which distracted the English attention from them should therefore be avoided.

In fact till the renewed offensive of the Marathas nearly a decade after the battle of Panipat (1761) there was no real menace to these possessions, and an optimism about their security pervaded the political thinking of Clive's successor, Verelst. Verelst sought to justify his faith before the Court by an elaborate study of the 'constitution of politics' of contemporary India<sup>78</sup>. There was no other comparable power to put up effective resistance to the English. The invasions of Nadir Shah, the Marathas and Abdali left the Mughal empire, the only comprehensive political system, in complete exhaustion. The enormous money tribute exacted by Abdali dislocated the economy 'which produces no silver and but very little gold'. The resultant fall in the quantity of money in circulation brought about 'a decay of trade and a diminution of cultivation'. The obvious consequence was the inability of the different powers to raise a large army and to conceive plans of conquest. Constant feuds among themselves further weakened them, so that a combined opposition to the English was out of question. The resources of Shah Alam, a force to reckon with, were spent 'to support rather the name than the substance of an army'. Since his absorbing passion was to sit on the throne of Delhi, he had no intention of dissipating his resources by quarrelling with the English. The Nawab of Oudh, who owed the English his restoration to his dominions, was bound to the English by 'policy and necessity'. The Marathas were torn by 'intestine divisions and jealousies'. Moreover, the Maratha army, by constitution and composition, was undependable for sustained warfare. Far from being a menace to the English, the emergence of the Sikh power was quite reassuring, since it served as a buffer against Abdali's invasions.

This optimism was often co-existent with another distinct strain of thought, which was not wholly consistent with the optimism. The English did not feel confident that they could make their possessions secure only by their role of passive onlookers. On the contrary, their policy was not to allow any power to grow to such extent where it would prove a menace



to the English. The judgement, however, as to when and how the menace would be real was liable to be faulty, as a consequence of which the English often committed themselves to a positive policy of reducing the strength of the state concerned to a level where it ceases to be a menace altogether. Hence the basic dualism in the Company's foreign policy.

The relation with Oudh may be taken as an illustration. During Clive's time it was perfectly cordial, and Verelst inherited Clive's optimism that things would go well in future, though he had different notions of the uses of the alliance. To Verelst the Nawab of Oudh seemed 'a much more proper instrument to accomplish the Company's maintaining themselves as the umpires of Hindoostan than an enemy who from his strength or situation could give them any material uneasiness or trouble'<sup>79</sup>. Such a notion was not inconsistent with the optimism alluded to before. From the beginning, however, a dissident voice was being heard, which could gradually make its influence felt over the Select Committee. The voice was Smith's, the Commander of the Company's forces at Allahabad. He suspected anti-British plot in the reorganisation of army by the Nawab of Oudh, arguing, with amusing naivete, that in the general state of peace the only conceivable motive behind this reorganisation was anti-British hostility. The Select Committee at first argued it away as utterly preposterous, emphasising the old theme that considerations of 'policy and necessity' would prevent him from pursuing an anti-British policy. Verelst related the army reorganisation to the Nawab's "wishes to recover that degree of influence he once held in the empire". Verelst believed that such a move was quite natural, particularly in view of the big changes in the politics of the Court. Moreover, the candidness of the Nawab in informing the English of this reorganisation should have completely disarmed the English apprehension. Yet the Select Committee thought it prudent to "check in the beginning those symptoms of ambition that may in time become dangerous and insisted on "a speedy reduction of his (the Nawab's) unbounded ambition which will make him regard us as his rivals for power, than his steady friends". Thus Verelst stated the new point of view: "While the Nawab continued weak and dependent it mattered little what his secret intentions were and the moment he could rise considerably above the common level, a restriction of his increasing strength in consequence became necessary from such an accession of power, as our plan of politics and the general tranquility were endangered whether the blow was immediately levelled at ourselves or some weaker neighbours"<sup>80</sup>. The English decided to reduce the strength of the Nawab's army, but not to the point of destroying its efficacy to withstand enemy aggression. By the treaty of Benares (28th November, 1768) the Nawab could keep an army of not more than 35,000 and agreed not to train it in the European style.

The English were hesitating between two choices: to weaken the Nawab to such an extent that he ceased to be a menace to the English, or to use Oudh as a buffer state in which case a strong force would be the



first requisite to withstand the enemy. The conception of Oudh as a buffer state had grown weaker since Clive's time, probably due to the absence of real danger on the frontier. The notion that some dangers may arise out of the Nawab's ambitions tended therefore to harden. Cartier, the successor of Verelst, inherited this stubborn prejudice and was fond of reiterating that the Nawab had been constantly vacillating between 'ambition' and 'timidity'. In fact Cartier's attitude to the Nawab was stiffer in view of the latter's secret negotiations with the Marathas who were looked upon as enemies by the English. Cartier could not approve of this alliance though it was merely a part of the Nawab's strategy for annexing Rohilkhand and was not even remotely motivated by anti-English designs. The English were afraid that the absorption of Rohilkhand would remove an effective barrier against the Marathas, and so compelled the Nawab to abandon the scheme of annexing the state. By a treaty the Nawab agreed to defend the state against the Marathas in return of the payment of Rupees Forty lakhs to him by the Rohillas. Thus under new circumstances the concept of buffer state was revived again.

The relationship with Oudh was developing new features when the English, with the help of their increasing political control, started to utilise a part of the state's economic resources. The forms and methods of this utilisation varied in different periods. Besides a considerable amount paid as war indemnity, the Nawab agreed, by the treaty of 1765, to pay for the employment of English troops, whenever this was necessary. Circumstances, mostly connected with the stationing of Company's Third Brigade at Allahabad, compelled the English to claim a larger share in the surplus revenue of the state. The first doubts as to the usefulness of the brigade gradually faded away, and it was looked upon as an indisputable requisite for the security of Company's possessions. Thus Verelst stated its usefulness: "Its situation makes it in some measure the key of the surrounding countries, and its vicinity to the several countries of Suja Dowlah, the Rohillas, Jats, and Marathas enable us to penetrate their views with more certainty and, in case of necessity, to enter any part with our army in ten or fifteen days"<sup>81</sup>. The problem, however, was to pay for it, and it was tending to be serious in the perspective of the present distressful state of this country proceeding from the 'scarcity of silver specie'—a theme Verelst was fond of discussing at length. With the deepening of the silver crisis the English were desperately searching for some palliative measures. Once a suggestion was offered to pay Shah Alam the Bengal tribute no longer in silver but in the new gold *mohurs* coined in the mints of Calcutta and Murshidabad. At another time the English virtually encouraged Shah Alam to pursue his plan of annexing some territories of the Hindu *raja* of Bundelkhand, since they were promised by Shah Alam half of the revenue from the new acquisitions. Once the situation appeared so alarming that Verelst even contemplated the withdrawal of the Third Brigade, since it would considerably minimise the 'annual drain of treasure' from Bengal. None of these suggestions



was put into practice. It was Hastings who in 1773 could persuade the Nawab to pay a considerable amount for the maintenance of the Brigade.

In a real sense the period from 1765 to 1772 saw the beginnings of English economic domination over Oudh—an issue which complicated the political relationship with the state. The private trade of the Company's servants developed first. The treaty of 1765 contained a provision (clause 8) permitting a free commerce for the Company. The Nawab, however, opposed all suggestions for setting up English factories in his dominions. He showed, as Clive wrote, an 'uneasiness about the word factories'. He was afraid that 'a private trade in his dominions must necessarily be productive of disputes with the English and, would probably end in his destruction, as it had before ruined Meer Cossim'<sup>82</sup>. So strong were the Nawab's feelings over the question that Clive had ultimately to yield. The Nawab was assured that the right to free commerce would not be exercised without the final approval of the Court of Directors. Whatever the reasons, the Court did not encourage free trade.

Despite the early restrictions private trade did grow in Oudh. Verelst related this growth to the decline of opportunities for private traders in Bengal as a consequence of which they turned to Oudh<sup>83</sup>. He has analysed the various circumstances which caused this decline. The strict enforcement by Clive of the covenants forbidding taking of presents left to the servants no other means of 'acquiring the most moderate independency but by trade'. The scope for such a trade, however, was getting narrower and 'the prodigious advance' of the Company's investment had "struck at the very existence of small private commerce". The competition in the market from the Dutch and the French, who were 'amply supplied with money', made the English Company more eager to make as large purchases as possible. The Company found it easier to exclude the English private traders than the organized Dutch and French companies. The abolition of the private monopoly trade in salt and betelnut was another encroachment on the private traders' preserve. Under these circumstances Oudh seemed to them a more promising field for their activities.

As in Bengal, the trade was illegitimate and thrived on various malpractices. The established local trade groups, of whom the most important were the Armenians, invariably served as middlemen for the private traders. Verelst was surprised to learn that "the Armenians indeed, in general, seem to have adopted a system of fixing themselves in the Nabob's dominions, as they were formerly at Murshidabad"<sup>84</sup>. Bolts (the author of *Considerations*, whose strictures on the trade organisation and general administration of the Company were provoked by the annoying restrictions on his private trade) employed 150 Armenian agents<sup>85</sup>.

The Nawab could not for long ignore this development and wrote to the English Government in Bengal of his anxiety to "free his country from the Armenians and Bengals". Complaints about the trade came from other quarters as well. In March, 1768 Captain Harper observed that the permission to the Armenians, a 'designing and intriguing set of people'.



to settle in the Nawab's dominions would inevitably result in clashes with the Nawab. Even Colonel Smith, whose anti-Nawab prejudices were too well known, suggested to the Select Committee 'most vigorous measures for entirely abolishing a system so fraught with pernicious consequences'<sup>86</sup>. To allay the Nawab's apprehensions, the Select Committee passed a set of regulations forbidding Company's servants and other Europeans to trade in Oudh. A covenanted servant violating these regulations would risk confiscation of his goods and dismissal from service. A free merchant guilty of this violation would forfeit his licence to reside in the country<sup>87</sup>. The Nawab succeeded to a great extent in restraining the private traders by rigorously enforcing the regulations.

Private trade could thus be kept confined to narrow limits. The Company, however, as a public body was becoming more and more aware of the potentialities of Oudh as a field of English commerce. The Court of Directors considered the prohibition on English commerce in Oudh as 'impolitic and pernicious'<sup>88</sup>. The extension of English commerce to Oudh was a vital need, particularly in view of the depression in Bengal commerce in various ways. It would give the English access to other markets nearby, particularly the long distance trade line from Oudh. Moreover, the increasing sale of British goods and the extension of the market for Bengal silk would result in a flow of specie from Oudh to Bengal—a development most welcome to Bengal ridden for long by a silver crisis<sup>89</sup>.

While the English were thus widening tentacles over Oudh, Shah Alam was drawing apart, the reasons of which are not far to seek. The settlement of 1765 could scarcely satisfy him, and he took it to be a stop-gap arrangement, though it gave him a sound political base and a handsome income. He looked forward to the day when he would sit on the throne of Delhi and he wished away the practical difficulties in the way. The execution of this grandiose plan of his was not necessarily incompatible with the alliance with the English. The English knew well of Shah Alam's ambition, and yet did not hesitate to make an ally of Shah Alam. But a conflict soon developed over this issue. Finding that the English had no enthusiasm for his plan Shah Alam turned to the Marathas who in the late sixties recovered much of their influence in Northern India and promised Shah Alam all possible assistance towards the execution of his plan. Shah Alam completely ignored the English warnings against the alliance with Marathas, whom the English looked upon as a new threat to the existing balance of power in India. The final breach came in 1773 during the administration of Hastings. It is quite likely that the English, desperately searching for means to solve their financial crisis, would have sooner or later stopped payment of Bengal tribute to Shah Alam which would amount to a repudiation of the alliance. The ill-judged step of Shah Alam in trusting the Marathas only hastened the inevitable process.

In the years 1757-1772 the English thus emerged as a political power in the country. The Bengal Nawabs, deprived of all political authority, became a mere pageant. The political alliances strengthened the political



system in Bengal to the extent that they constituted an effective barrier against any external attack. But in spite of increasing political control of the English they abstained from active participation in the country's administration, and one of the significant problems of the political history of Bengal in the period under review is how the English finally decided as late as 1771-72 in favour of this participation.

Before 1765 any direct administration by the English was of course limited to a few districts—the 24-Parganas, Chittagong, Burdwan and Midnapur. The acquisition of *diwani* in 1765 gave the English much wider opportunities for this. They, however, kept themselves aloof from administrative responsibility and trusted it to indigenous agencies, supervised and controlled by the English Resident at the Durbar. One finds it difficult to agree with Firminger's view that the English were wary of this responsibility primarily because of their ignorance of the land revenue administration of the country. Such an ignorance is an undeniable fact, but it is unhistorical to explain the shirking of administrative responsibility by the English by this alone. In fact before Verelst's plan of Supra-visorship (1769) the English did not take any trouble to enrich their understanding of the complex agrarian situation of Bengal and the administrative problems connected with it. They stood aloof from direct administration because they believed that the troubles it would mean were not worth taking and in fact were unnecessary, since the state of land revenue collections was not any worse for their indifference. With time such a complacence was shaken, and the conviction that only a direct administration by the Company's servants would set matters right was precisely the reason why the English finally decided to intervene.

The Court of Directors stressed often the incompatibility of the existing mode of management of zamindaris within the broad framework of *diwani* administration with the security of Company's revenue. In the letter of 11th November, 1768 the Court selected the question of large arrears in the Dinajpur zamindary as a test case. The fall in collections was not due to any decline in population, but 'solely' due to 'the villainy, profusion, and folly of the Rajah and his ministers', who were inadequately controlled by the general *diwani* administration. A 'thorough investigation' by "one or more of our most experienced servants" was suggested as one of the fruitful means for stopping the 'depredation of the revenues'. In the letter of 30th June, 1769 the Court contrasted the prosperity of the ceded districts with the economic decline of the districts under the *diwani* administration, and attributed the former to "the constant and minute direction of our covenanted servants". The Court believed that 'a patient and moderate exertion of the powers invested in us by the grant of the Dewannee' would go a long way towards restraining 'the numerous tribes of fougedars, aumils, sikdars', whose 'oppression' largely accounted for the unhappy state of land revenue collections in the *diwani* districts. The removal of this 'immense number of idle sycophants, who . . . are placed between the tenant and the





public treasury' would prevent an enormous waste of state revenues. Of the means suggested for the security of Company's revenue, the Court emphasised a sound knowledge of the country's economic resources to be obtained through the active participation of the servants in the administration and an eventual replacement of the zamindari bureaucracy by the Company's servants. The appointment of 'Comptrollers for the management of the Duannee revenue' was the first step in the direction of introducing direct administration of the Company. The Resident at the *Durbar*, Richard Becher, another powerful voice in favour of modifying the *diwani* administration, described the usual device of the administration to send *amils* to replace the zamindars who were reluctant to pay the high revenue demanded of them. The practice, Becher thought, amounted to a simple desertion of responsibility on the part of the administration and left the wretched peasants fully exposed to the exploitation by a class of speculators. The remedy suggested by the Resident was a farming system, on the basis of three years' lease, the working of which would be supervised by an English collector. It was Verelst who made the first significant experiment in respect of Company's direct administration in the *diwani* districts. Verelst mixed up ethical considerations with economic, though no one misses his emphasis on the latter. The ethical principle he enunciated was simple enough: "The people give us the labour of their hands, and in return, we owe them our protection"<sup>90</sup>. Arguing from this assumption he concluded that "to hold vast possessions, and yet to act on the level of mere merchants, making gain our first principle; to receive an immense revenue without possessing an adequate protective power over the people who pay it . . . are paradoxes not to be reconciled". But Verelst did not forget for a moment that the direct administration of the Company was after all an economic necessity. He was writing in the shadow of a great economic stringency which he characterised as a 'crisis'. A silver crisis had already caused a great deal of dislocation in the economy. Moreover, the Company was in dire need of much larger resources in view of the increasing dependence of its Far Eastern trade on the Bengal surplus and the necessity of a larger payment by the Company to the Crown treasury. But the existing administration was scarcely equipped to grapple with the problem. With a fervent belief that a direct participation of the Company's servants in the administration would go a long way towards solving it Verelst created a new office called 'supravisorship' manned entirely by Company's servants. Verelst's idea, however, was not to replace the existing administration by this new institution. In the field of land revenue administration the Supervisor's duties were limited, to collection of informations relevant to the country's agrarian situation.

Verelst's plan failed, but by the end of his administration an intellectual climate was created where new ideas on the desirable form of administration were received with greater open-mindedness. Constant criticism of the *diwani* administration had already undermined the force



of convictions of its supporters. In the letter of 29th August, 1771 the Court announced the decision "to stand forth as Duan, and, by the agency of the Company's servants, to take upon themselves the entire care and management of the revenues".

The direct administration was believed to be a cure for all the ills, but it was soon found that it only aggravated them. The reason, the analysis of which lies beyond the scope of this chapter, was that the new scheme was a change only in the superstructure of administration, and the basic anomalies arising out of gross over-assessment and maladjustment of relations between the farmers and the peasants were left as they were.

The gradual transformation of the structure of political authority in Bengal brought fundamental changes in the economy and society of the country. The remaining portion of this chapter will be devoted to a brief analysis of one such change having clear political implications—a re-definition of the relationship of the state with the zamindars. In very many cases in the 24-Parganas and the ceded districts, the change consisted in the supersession of a large number of traditional landholders by a new class of farmers. Political considerations partly account for this radical measure. The English had a built-in prejudice that the existence of large estates would be incompatible with the security of their new regime since 'the several rajahs and zamindars would assume to themselves an independent power' and would be prone to 'despise' the administration. Far more important, however, were the economic considerations. A usual phenomenon in the big estates was large arrears in the payment of revenue. Moreover as the English proceeded to enforce the new principle of land revenue assessment, that is, gradual approximation of revenue to the entire economic surplus, the zamindari system appeared as a cumbrous anachronism. Either the system would have to be reoriented to the economic needs of the Company, or if it was found wanting that way, it would be set aside. It was soon found that the system was inconsistent with the Company's requirements. Arguing from the assumption that the country could pay more than the zamindars were paying, the Company concluded that the continuation of the existing zamindari system would ultimately defeat the scheme of forming an estimate of the actual resources of the country. The system of putting up land to the highest bidders was believed to be the only infallible guide to them, since it was argued no rational person would agree to pay more than he could. The new system thus superseded zamindars in very many cases. Even when it failed to fulfil the high expectations of the Company, the substitute for the discredited system was not the old zamindari system. In Burdwan the method of public auction of land revenue was abandoned and Verelst exercised his option 'to engage men of substance and character'. The substance of farming system was thus retained.

The experiments of Mir Qasim himself were based on the assumption that when the object was to increase revenue suddenly, the existing system was an unworkable mechanism. Mir Qasim had to mobilise all



possible resources in order to stabilise his position, and found in the appropriation of a large part of zamindars' income a ready means for that. Ghulam Husain, the author of *Seir*, would have us believe that Mir Qasim "in his heart, had been at all times an enemy to zamindars". His conviction, we are further told, was that a direct administration by the state "rendered the country populous and flourishing, the husbandman easy, the traveller safe, the land everywhere tilled and green . . . . . whereas now that the zamindars are left to themselves and the reins floating on their necks, mischiefs are increasing every day, the land becomes desolate, and the revenues fall short and are in confusion"<sup>91</sup>. Such a conviction lent an edge to his decision to appropriate the income of some zamindars—which was after all an unavoidable necessity for the state.

After the acquisition of *diwani* in 1765, the Company did not alter its methods of land revenue administration. Ignorant of the actual resources of the country, the Company accepted the assessment of Mir Qasim as a model for the *diwani* districts. The enforcement of such an assessment which was suited for an emergency situation and was thus evidently based on an exaggerated valuation of the country's resources resulted in excluding very many zamindars from the land revenue settlement. The new system was essentially a farming system though the agency to operate it was restricted to a group of persons called *amils*.

The redefinition of the state relationship with the zamindars was a revolutionary change in this sphere. The system of Murshid Quli, the only other experiment before the English took over which left a deep impact on the zamindari system, was not conceived as a substitute for the zamindari system. Murshid Quli himself created new zamindars and encouraged the formation of extensive zamindaris; in this case the experiment resulted in weeding out only an inefficient section of zamindars. The English system amounted to a negation of the zamindari system altogether, and the political powers in their hands enabled them to make choices as regards a substitute for it.

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18. Ibid; Vol. I; p. 64.
19. Ibid; Vol. I; Mr. Sykes to Vansittart, Cossimbazar, September 16, 1760. p. 82.
20. Ibid; Vol. Select Committee at Calcutta to President and Council of Fort St. George. 28th July, 1760. pp. 76-78.
21. Ibid; Vol. I. Vansittart to Colonel Caillaud August 4, 1760. Pp. 64-65.
22. Ibid; Vol. I. Copy of the Proceedings at a Select Committee held at Calcutta. September 11, 1760. p. 83-92.
23. Verelst. *A View etc.* Appendix No. XLVI.
24. "*Dupleix and Clive*", Indian Reprint (1962). p.236.
25. Ibid; Ch. 9, p. 173.
26. "The dispute in regard to the duties on private inland trade was neither the sole, nor even a principal cause of his war with the English. He had wider, and more ambitious designs, when he finally determined to go to war". *Mir Qasim* by Nanda Lal Chatterji, Allahabad, 1935. p. 235. By way of explaining these "ambitious designs" he wrote: "There is no doubt that the Nawab had, from the beginning, aimed at establishing his complete independence of the English, and that he patiently strove to break the supremacy which they had obtained after the revolution of 1757. His object was to establish an independent and unfettered 'Subahdari' in Bengal by reducing the extraordinary power and influence of the European traders". Ibid., p. 219.
27. Vide No. 24.
28. Verelst. *A View; etc.* p. 47.
29. Ibid.
30. Vansittart. *A Narrative etc.* Vol. 2. pp. 185-186.
31. Ibid; Vol. 2, p. 143.
32. "Treaties of commerce are understood to be for the mutual benefit of the contracting parties. Is it then possible to suppose that the Court of Dehly, by conferring the privilege of trading free of customs, could mean an inland trade in the commodities of their own country . . . to the detriment of their revenues and the sum of their own merchants? We do not find such a construction was ever heard of until our servants first invented it and afterwards supported it by violence". Letter from Court. April 26, 1765. Para 23. Verelst. *A View etc.* Appendix No. XXX.
33. "The Company never carried on any inland trade . . . their commerce has been confined to exports and imports only". Clive's speech in the House of Commons. March 30, 1772. Quoted in *The Life of Lord Clive*, by George Forrest. Vol. 2, London, 1918. p. 225.
34. Verelst. *A View, etc.* Chapter IV, p. 105.
35. Ibid.
36. Vansittart. *A Narrative etc.* Vol. 2; p. 140. Gentlemen at Luckypoor to the Board. November 6, 1762.
37. Ibid. Vol. 2. P. 99. Nabob to the Governor, May, 1769.
38. Verelst. *A View, etc.* p. 8.



39. Hastings wrote to Vansittart from Bhagulpore : "I have been surprised to meet with several English flags flying in places which I have passed; and on the river, I do not believe that I have passed a boat without one". Letter dated April 25, 1762. Vansittart—*A Narrative* etc. Vol. 2 ; p. 80.
40. Vansittart. *A Narrative* etc. Vol. 2, pp. 99-100. The Nawab to the Governor, May, 1762.
41. Verelst. *A View* etc. p. 85.
42. Vansittart. *A Narrative*, etc. Vol. 2, p. 103. The Nawab to the Governor, April, 1762.
43. Ibid; Vol. 2, p. 100. The Nawab to the Governor, May, 1762.
44. Ibid; Vol. 2, pp. 165-166.
45. Ibid; Vol. 2, pp. 150-161. Regulations of December 1762.
46. Ibid; Vol. 2, Consultations of March 1, 1762.
47. Ibid; pp. 372-373.
48. Ibid; pp. 354-355.
49. Ibid; p. 355.
50. Ibid; p. 362.
51. Ibid; p. 329, 323.
52. Ibid; p. 52.
53. Ibid; Vol. 3, Nawab's letters to Vansittart. March 5, 1763. March 11, 1763. March 15, 1763. Vansittart's Minute of 22nd March, 1763. pages 40, 48, 72-75, 82, 85 of this volume.
54. Ibid; Vol. 3, p. 145.
55. Letter to the Court. January 24, 1767. para 20.
56. Verelst. *A View* etc. p. 49.
57. Ibid; p. 49.
58. Letter to the Court February 1, 1766. para 17.
59. Vansittart. *A Narrative* etc. Vol. 3. Consultations of June 20, 1763.
60. Ibid; pp. 279, 281-282, 285.
61. Ibid; p. 282.
62. Ibid; p. 323.
63. Ibid; p. 284.
64. Treaty of July 10, 1763. Verelst—*A View* etc. Appendix XLIX.
65. Forrest thus commented on these transactions : "All delicacy was laid aside in the manner in which payment for the personal losses was pressed". *The Life of Robert Clive*—Vol. 2.
66. Letter to Court, September 30, 1765.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid, February 1, 1766.
69. Ibid, December 31, 1758, para 9.
70. Ibid, February 20, 1764.
71. Ibid, September 27, 1764.
72. Ibid, January 24, 1767.
73. Ibid, September 30, 1765, para 12.
74. Verelst. *A View* etc. Appendix No. LII.
75. Letter to Court September 10, 1765, para 8.
76. Ibid, February 19, 1766, para 22.
77. Clive's letter to the Select Committee, January 16, 1767.
78. Letter to the Court, March 28, 1768; September 25, 1768.
79. Ibid, March 28, 1768.
80. Ibid, September 25, 1768.
81. Vide No. 79.
82. Verelst. *A View* etc. p. 4 footnote.
83. Vide No. 79.
84. Verelst. *A View* etc. Appendix p. 204.





85. Ibid, Introduction. p. 34 footnote.
86. Ibid, Appendix p. 186. Letter of January 3, 1768.
87. Letter to Court, April 10, 1768.
88. Letter from Court, April 10, 1771, para 33.
90. Verelst. *A View* etc. Appendix, p. 122.
91. *Scir*. 2nd Ed. Calcutta Vol. 2, pp. 393-394.



## POLITICAL HISTORY : 1772-1793

*Mir Qasim's political activity in exile*

One of the great fighters of India in a lost cause was Mir Qasim, for some time ruler of Bengal. After the battle of Buxar he was a homeless wanderer. But the British in Bengal had some respect for him as an enemy and tried naturally to keep themselves well-informed of his movements. We can form some idea of fugitive Mir Qasim's hopes and plans, many of them quixotic and extravagant, many the impotent imagination of despair. Like a 'phantom vessel floating about on the wide seas without an anchor without a port', he still catches our imagination and gives to his own life story an interest and as a determined adversary to the history of the establishment of British power in Bengal a dignity that it would not otherwise have attained.

Even before the battle of Buxar he was disgraced and imprisoned by the orders of Shuja-ud-daula and most of his friends had disappeared after having made each of them his nest in the bosom of the Vizier's court. It is a story sickening in its details. "He was robbed by Shuja-ud-daula of the whole of his property which was traced by the means of severities exercised upon his women, upon his eunuchs and upon his other dependants. The whole was confiscated and nothing remained to him but a few jewels of high value which he had some time before sent to Najib-ud-daula's country under the care of a trusty servant of his". It was the sale of these jewels that supported the forlorn prince in his days of distress. "There might have been some other matters besides which women by the means of old ones, their attendants, may have found means to conceal"<sup>1</sup>. After the defeat of his nominal allies at Buxar, the unfortunate prince had a providential escape. He fled to Allahabad and managed to free his family, confined in the fort there by Shuja-ud-daula. Thence by forced marches he reached Bareilly and sought shelter among Ruhela Afghans.

From this retreat he emerged again and again and planned the recovery of his lost dominion. But he had not the sinews of war. Therefore Shuja-ud-daula by crippling the resources of Mir Qasim must be held primarily responsible for rendering these attempts so futile. Fighting under such circumstances where the sale proceeds of jewels would meet the expenses was not merely a desperate task but an absurd one. The bankers with whom he had deposited much of his money in Bengal took advantage of his helpless situation to withhold payment. With one of them, Bolaki Das, Mir Qasim had deposited 12 lakhs and he got only 80,000 out of this sum<sup>2</sup>.

Still what he had saved from the wreckage of his fortune in jewels was just sufficient to make him restless but not sufficient to make his



schemes effective. But Mir Qasim was a man of boundless energy, implacable revenge and a very rare opponent to meet in the indolent east.

In his hopeless project of restoration Mir Qasim looked out for allies. Those from whom he could possibly expect any help were the Ruhelas, the Jats, Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Sikhs, the Marathas, the French and Haidar Ali.

The emperor Shah Alam II, a fugitive 'with high claims and feeble resources', was a British pensioner at Allahabad. Even when he returned to Delhi in 1772 with Maratha help his position was far too precarious, his resources much too limited to incline him to help in another ex-ruler's restoration.

The Ruhelas were the enemies of Shuja-ud-daula. Naturally Mir Qasim expected that they would be of some use to him. But they were too much divided among themselves. None of the chiefs—Hafiz Rahamat Khan, Dundi Khan, Sardar Khan and Fateh Khan was singly strong enough for a foreign war. Moreover, Hafiz Rahamat Khan, the oldest of them was very parsimonious. Only when attacked could the Ruhelas possibly combine. They had not the enterprise for a grand undertaking of restoring a king to his throne. The Jat state of Bharatpur, so strong and so rich under Suraj Mal, had been very much weakened under his successor Jawahir Singh, and domestic disputes gave full employment to the sons of Suraj Mal who had naturally no time to look abroad. Najib-ud-daula, Regent of Delhi (1761-70) who was the chief beneficiary of the Abdali victory at Panipat, had no desire of interrupting his own tranquillity. He died in 1770 and his successor Zabita Khan was so incapable that he ruined his heritage within a very short period. The Sikhs created such a difficult situation for Abdali that he ceased to count in North Indian politics even before his death in 1773. The Sikhs, described in the British records as "the Marathas of the North, like them their sole profession arms, their sole pursuit plunder" were extending their ravages even beyond the Jumna but they were incapable of concerted expeditions on a large scale and to make things more difficult for Mir Qasim their services would have to be bought and he had not the wherewithal. The French could not be of any help to him as they were at a great distance. Neither could Haidar assist him materially as he had his hands too full in the south. Mir Qasim meditated an alliance with the Marathas. He bitterly regretted that he had not turned to the Marathas for support after the capture of Azimabad by the English. In 1768, from his retreat in the Ruhela country, he wanted to go to the south to join the Marathas. But the Ruhelas would not let him go. The over-cautious Hafiz Rahmat Khan feared that this would give rise to grave complications. He wrote to Dundi Khan about the ill consequence and though Mir Qasim had started he was ordered to come back and he had to comply<sup>3</sup>.

Mir Qasim reappeared on the scene in the seventies. He came to Agra from his retreat in the Ruhela country. After a few days' stay in Agra he went to the territory of the Raja of Gohad, about 60 miles from



Agra. There a little fort was vacated and given to him for residence. It is said that he began to negotiate with the Maratha chiefs who had come to Northern India and to raise troops on his own account. He published a declaration "promising large rewards to such of his chiefs as were formerly in his service and will again join him. Scarcely anything is heard of but Qasim Ali Khan". He expected that the Marathas would join him as also the Sikhs. Ghaziuddin, a former Delhi Vizier, also promised to stand by him. Hafiz Rahmat Khan was reported to be in the confederacy though this seems to be very doubtful. His son, Inait Khan was, however, ready to join Mir Qasim openly. Though Ahmad Khan Bangash of Farrukhabad openly refused any assistance to Mir Qasim privately he allowed troops to be raised for him. Samru and Madec, the treacherous European officers of Mir Qasim, who had joined Shuja-ud-daula and after his treaty with the English were roaming about, now came to Gohad to serve under Mir Qasim. Samru assured him that he would be able to reconcile the Jats and the Sikhs and bring the Sikhs over to his side. The Jats are even said to have allowed guns to be brought out of the Agra fort for the use of the confederate army<sup>5</sup>. It was rumoured that Hafiz Rahmat Khan had informed Mir Qasim that if he advanced to Etawah five thousand foot soldiers and twenty loads of rockets would be sent. The formation of this strong anti-British confederacy synchronised with "a mysterious and unconfidential behaviour on the part of the Emperor and Shuja-ud-daula"<sup>6</sup>. The Select Committee at Calcutta would leave nothing to chance and ordered that the British magazine at Allahabad should be removed to the safe cantonments at Bankipore.

The rendezvous of this grand confederate army was fixed at Koil (Ali-garh). It was hoped that the combination of the fighting strength of so many people would be irresistible. This grand plan of Mir Qasim of combining the Marathas, the Ruhelas, the Sikhs, the Jats and the Rana of Gohad in opposition to the English reminds us of the grand design of that great enemy of a Roman Empire in the East, Mithridates the Great. After repeated defeats in the hands of Lucculus and Pompey, when Mithridates withdrew to Panticapacum "he planned to march westwards through Thrace, Macedonia and Pannonia to carry with him the Scythians in the Sarmatian steppes and the Celts in the Danube as allies and with the avalanche of peoples to throw himself in Italy"<sup>7</sup>. The plan of Mir Qasim was as unrealizable as the plan of Mithridates VI. His finances were insufficient to purchase allies and even to pay his own troops. The jarring interests refused to combine. The Sikhs and the Jats could not be reconciled. The Marathas had given him hopes with a view to sharing in his supposed treasure but when they found that he had not the ability to satisfy their demands they withdrew. The opposing interests of the coalitionists, their jealousy and distrust and his own want of money led to the failure of this plan of combination. Most of his Sardars deserted him but he had spent much of what he had and this collapse left him 'without a friend, without a treasure or any means of defending himself,



far less of molesting his neighbours'. The President of the Select Committee at Calcutta, wrote, "To form these into one body in one cause is from the political genius of Hindustan, the characteristic manners of the people in general and of these chiefs in particular an improbable, if not an impracticable event"<sup>8</sup>. Mir Qasim found himself further discredited in the eyes of Hindustan.

Mir Qasim attempted to sow discord between the British and the puppet Nawab of Bengal by planning that certain letters of his written to the Nawab should fall into the hands of the English. But they saw through the design. He wrote, "My brother, once more by the blessings of God I have about 3000 horse and foot in pay. I have sent for the heads of the Sikhs and I shall soon be able to join you. I therefore recommend you to be watchful of the feringhees and find employment for their troops elsewhere . . . send me bills for three lakhs"<sup>9</sup>. After all these futile attempts when all the plans of Mir Qasim had failed leaving him almost a bankrupt, we do not hear much of his activity in 1771. But in 1772 he sent a feeler to Shuja-ud-daula through one West, an Englishman in his employ. Though Shuja-ud-daula had so shabbily treated him and was responsible for much of his misfortune he now hoped that the Nawab must have found the English alliance galling as he himself had found. West wrote to Shuja-ud-daula about the injustice of the English and very cleverly attempted to instil suspicion, assured him that his strength was quite adequate and advised an alliance with the French. He added that the English forces were inadequate and the zamindars were dissatisfied. He added that Mir Qasim was very much willing to act in cooperation. "He wishes most earnestly from a friendship to submit and is ready to convince you of his sincerity, even to put one of his children under your protection as a proof of your friendship and regard"<sup>10</sup>. It was also suggested that if a combined attack was made the Dutch and the French would join. The dissatisfied zamindars might also act in concert. But to Shuja-ud-daula the lesson of Buxar was perhaps sufficient and he had no desire to ally himself with Mir Qasim whom he had wronged so much. He handed over the letter to the British.

In 1774 Mir Qasim was again in the limelight. Hastings had stopped the payment of tribute to the Emperor. On the advice of Abdul Ahad Khan Shah Alam II now wanted to make Mir Qasim a pawn in the game of diplomacy. He talked of establishing Mir Qasim in Ajmer. *Khilats* were given to Mir Qasim. We read in the *Delhi News from Poona* that Mir Qasim was asked to come from Jodhpur to see the Emperor<sup>11</sup>. But this show of taking up his cause did not have the desired effect on the English. Asaf-ud-daula, successor of Shuja-ud-daula, brought pressure to bear on the Emperor's advisers and Mir Qasim could not get a footing in the Imperial Court<sup>12</sup>. In the revised treaty which was concluded with Asaf-ud-daula it was provided that the 'Nawab is not to allow Qasim Ali Khan, ex-sultan of Bengal, to enter his dominions'. In the Imperial Court Mir Bakshi Najaf Khan who had served at one time under



Mir Qasim in Bengal had some kindly feeling for him but he could not help him in his attempt to establish himself in imperial favour nor could he provide him with what might be sufficient for his maintenance in dignity and comfort.

In the course of his wanderings Mir Qasim is said to have gone to the country of the Rajputs and *Tarikh-i-Muzaffari* even informs us that he made an attempt on Nepal which was unsuccessful. In this connection the *Riyaz-us-Salatin* says very briefly and very vaguely that he had gone in the direction of the mountains<sup>13</sup>. He wrote a letter to Hastings explaining how he was unable to control developments after his rupture with the British and made a prayer for forgiveness<sup>14</sup>. He died of dropsy on the 7th June, 1777 at Shahjahanabad, and as his sons Ghulam Uraiz Jafari, Muhammad Baqir-ul-Husaini and others informed Mons. Chevalier, the French Governor, he left no provision for the support of his children<sup>15</sup>. Mir Qasim hoped and planned till there was life in him and even as an aged refugee he was considered to be a danger to the British in Bengal as the intelligence reports clearly indicate. This Mir Qasim 'menace', more supposed than real, was connected with a Maratha 'menace'.

#### *Political Development 1772-1775.*

The Marathas reappeared in northern India in 1769, recaptured Delhi in 1771 and brought the Emperor back to Delhi in January 1772. Clive's political system now required a substantial change. The Allahabad Settlement of 1765 made Oudh a buffer state, a barrier against the Marathas and the northern powers, a protected ally. The second article of the Treaty of 1765 laid down that in case of the invasion of the dominion of any one of the parties the other should help with a part or the whole of the force. "In the case of the English Company's forces being employed in his Highness's service the extraordinary expense of the same is to be defrayed by him". Nothing was mentioned regarding the expenses of the Wazir's troops. As Sir Arthur Wellesley later pointed out in an undated memorandum on Oudh, "The adoption of this system of alliance is always to be attributed to the weakness of the state which receives the assistance and the remedy aggravates the evil"<sup>16</sup>. Successive treaties between the Nawabs of Oudh and the British in Bengal indicate how the aggravation progressed.

The hostility between the Ruhelas and the house of Oudh was traditional. Safdar Jang, Shuja-ud-daula's father, had tried to suppress them. "He did not like Afghan rule in a district so close to his subah . . . and looked upon the Ruhelas as serpents infesting the road to Delhi"<sup>17</sup>. But he failed to crush them. Shuja-ud-daula now found his opportunity. With his Maratha allies the Emperor attacked Zabita Khan, son and successor of the Ruhela chief Najib-ud-Daula and captured his strongholds. Other Ruhela chieftains, headed by Hafiz Rahmat Khan who had rallied to his cause had to take shelter in the hills. Maratha light horse



raided Rohilkhand. Hafiz Rahmat approached Shuja and requested him to bring about a settlement with the Marathas. They demanded 40 lakhs as war contribution. An offensive and defensive alliance was concluded between the Ruhela chiefs and Shuja-ud-daula (13th June, 1772). This was sealed in the presence of the British general Sir Robert Barker. The Ruhela chiefs agreed to pay him 40 lakhs for "obliging the Marathas to retire either by peace or war, this to depend on the pleasure of the Wazir"<sup>18</sup>. The Marathas withdrew on the approach of the rainy season. The Emperor's opposition to the growing Maratha demands precipitated an open fight between them. The Emperor was defeated in the battle of Purana Qila on the 17th December, 1772. He agreed to cede formally to the Marathas the districts of Kora and Allahabad which had been given to him by Clive in 1765. The Marathas also crossed into the Doab and Shuja-ud-daula appealed to Hastings for immediate help. This led to what has been described as the Ramghat expedition. The Marathas had vacated Rohilkhand but everyone knew that they would be coming again as soon as possible. The cession of Kora and Allahabad to them created a difficult situation for the British. Shuja's frantic appeals for British help therefore met with a ready response. An English brigade under Colonel Champion first joined them and then came Sir Robert Barker with further reinforcements. They reached Ramghat on the 19th March, 1773. The British crossed the Ganges there and the Marathas retreated. The Marathas sent their vakils to Shuja who introduced them to Barker<sup>19</sup>. Shuja promised to take bonds from the Ruhelas and deliver them to the Marathas. The Marathas left for the Deccan in May, 1773. The murder of Peshwa Narayan Rao created such complications in the south that they could not reappear in northern India until 1784. They thus left a vacuum in the power politics of the north, a vacuum which Shuja-ud-daula did not certainly create.

British policy under Hastings now began to take shape. James Lawrell took over the charge of Kora and Allahabad from Munir-ud-daula, who was holding the provinces on behalf of Shah Alam, on 16th June, 1773. The Benares Conference between Hastings and Shuja was held in August, 1773. The treaty was actually concluded on 7th September. Hastings sold Kora and Allahabad to Shuja for 50 lakhs. Shuja promised to pay all the expenses of the Company's troops sent to his assistance, at the rate of Rs. 2,10,000 per brigade per month. Hastings promised to help Shuja in conquering Rohilkhand. There was to be a British political Resident in Oudh. Shuja agreed to confirm Chait Singh as the successor to Balwant Singh in Benares. Shuja would not agree to establish free trade between Bengal and Oudh and Chait Singh agreed to pass British goods duty free to Mirzapore, the chief mart for central and western Hindustan. Munir-ud-daula was at Allahabad after Shah Alam II's departure to his capital. He had not been forbidden to pay any more money to the Emperor on account of the Bengal tribute. He had remitted to Shah Alam at different times seven lakhs forty-five thousand eight



hundred rupees. He was not repaid this amount which Hastings was pleased to regard as Munir-ud-daula's personal loan to the Emperor<sup>20</sup>.

It should be noted here that in all these transactions with Shuja-ud-daula money played the most important part. The Marathas were so divided among themselves and appeared to be so anxious to avoid an encounter with the British that the Maratha danger theory in the year 1773 looks almost like a pretext. Shuja demanded his forty lakhs. Hafiz Rahamat was not in a position to pay. Shuja now asked for English help in annexing Rohilkhand. He agreed to pay forty lakhs to the East India Company. He got the help he wanted. The battle of Miranpur Katra of 23rd April, 1774 was decisive. Rohilkhand was annexed to Oudh. The Company got 40 lakhs.

It has been argued that this was a necessary frontier war 'against a nation from whom they had received no injury'. According to Hastings this transaction meant a reduction of military expenditure during the period of service and an ample supply to the treasury. To add to this "the Wazir would be freed from a troublesome neighbourhood and his dominion would be made more defensible". Hastings himself confessed "that the dependence of the Wazir upon the Company (in other words his weakness) would, by that extension of his possession be increased as he himself was incapable of defending his ancient possessions without the English support". The comment made by Mill is appropriate. "The desire of territory and plunder blinded the Wazir but of money, the Governor"<sup>21</sup>. The acquisition of Kora and Allahabad exposed the frontier to Maratha attacks in the Doab. The Ganges now formed the British frontier in Oudh. The acquisition of natural frontier perhaps played a secondary part in motivating the action of Hastings. He got money for the Company, money for himself, for some of his partisans and a new field and a new pasture for money-makers.

But this was the beginning of the rapid decay of Oudh. Financial distress created by weakness was increased by oppression. Interference with its internal economy now began. It set a new pattern. The treaty which was concluded with Asaf-ud-daula, Shuja-ud-daula's successor, in 1775, reduced him to the position of a subordinate ally. Maladministration vitiates the history of British connection with Oudh. It shares the odium with the Nawabi of Arcot and the Nizam's state as plague spots of gross 'native' misrule for which British connection was in a large measure responsible.

On the death of Shuja-ud-daula in 1775 a new treaty was concluded with his successor. Benares with its dependencies was ceded in perpetuity to the Company. By the treaty of Fyzabad concluded after the Ruhela war it was arranged that a regular brigade of the Company's troops would be stationed in Oudh, the Nawab bearing the expense. A second brigade was added in 1777 called the temporary brigade, the expense being charged on the Nawab. Some detached detachments of the Company were also placed in his pay. The establishment under the



Resident also swelled to a large extent. Englishmen like Colonel Hannay, in the service of Asaf-ud-daula, were also plundering as fast as they could. Asaf-ud-daula complained that the pressure was too much for him. He saw Hastings at Chunar after the Benares affair, made him a present of ten lakhs. Hastings put the money into the Company's treasury hoping that the Directors would permit him to take it for himself but they did not. Asaf-ud-daula pleaded for a new system. He argued: "My country and my house belong to you, there is no difference". The temporary brigade was removed. He was to maintain a single brigade and pay the expenses for the Residents's guard and the expenses of the Resident's office. But as Francis put it the English army had 'devoured his revenues and his country under colour of defending it'. The debt with which the Nawab stood charged in 1780 amounted to £1,400,000<sup>22</sup>. The Jagir of the Begams of Oudh was then seized and it was also decided that their treasures were also to be seized. The Nawab's debt to the Company was thus to be paid off. The spoliation of the Begams was sought to be defended by Hastings on the ground that the end justified the means. He was no doubt facing a public emergency, and badly needed all this money. The Maratha War, the progress of Haidar Ali in the Carnatic, the advance of the Berar army towards Bengal, the impending arrival of a French navy in the Indian seas with an army under Bussy to fight in the Carnatic—all this was argued in extenuating the crime.

#### *Benares and Oudh affairs 1781-82 :*

Another episode of importance was the expulsion of Chait Singh from Benares. The British first strengthened him by securing his confirmation in all the rights and privileges enjoyed by his father. He rendered Hastings many services in 'public affairs and trade and war such as the grant of a virtual monopoly for the purchase of opium in Ghazipur and assistance in the expedition against the Sannyasi raiders'<sup>23</sup>. He also helped Hastings in his private affairs like the purchase of diamonds for the remittance of his fortune to England. He was called Farzand (son) by Hastings. Contemporary Persian sources—*Balwant Nama*, *Tuhfa-i-Taza* and *Miftah-i-Khazain*—explain the origin and growth of the enmity of Warren Hastings leading ultimately to his victimization. Chait Singh has been described as weak and foolish, submissive and servile. He was asked by Francis Fowke, the Resident who was appointed by the Majority to disclose the *nazaranas* and *salamis* he had paid to Hastings. Hastings told Maharaja Misir, wakil of the Raja of Benares, that his honour lay in the hands of his master. Chait Singh thought that Clavering would become the Governor-General and he tried to gain the favour of the Majority by sending a deputation to Calcutta. But Hastings very soon acquired ascendancy in the Council. Francis Fowke was recalled. Thomas Graham was appointed in his place and the harassment, intimidation and fleecing of the Raja now began. Demand was followed by demand.



Hastings came to Benares. William Markham, who was now appointed Resident, was no less hostile than Graham. "According to Khairuddin after a talk with Hastings Markham wrote to the Raja that if he offered seventy lakhs in cash, (50 lakhs according to British sources) accepted an increase of seven lakhs to his annual tribute and gave security for punctual payment through bankers there would be no trouble in future"<sup>24</sup>. The Raja was already under arrest. Then occurred the affray at Shivala. Subsequent events are well known. The Raja escaped. War was declared upon him. He fled. A nephew of Chait Singh was selected as the Raja. His annual tribute was raised from 22 to 40 lakhs of rupees and civil and criminal jurisdiction and police were taken from his hands. The last episode of the campaign against Chait Singh was the capture of Bijaygarh. The army took the booty as prize money and Hastings got no relief from the expected treasure of Chait Singh. "The treasure in the fort amounting to 23 lakhs to which he had looked to replenish the treasury was seized upon by Popham and his officers and divided among themselves, even the subalterns receiving 20,000 rupees each"<sup>25</sup>. The increased land-revenue demand was beyond the capacity and condition of the country. It had a devastating effect on the economy of the province. The decay of the province, its rapid decline and the distress of the people, necessitated a remedy. The revenue was kept up but the resultant misery could not be ignored. With Jonathan Duncan's appointment as Resident in 1787 a change for the better began. Duncan abolished all *abwabs* introduced after the last year of Chait Singh's management. The land revenue collection in 1789 amounted to Rs. 3,544,335<sup>26</sup>.

It would not be irrelevant in this context if we describe the state of things in Oudh in 1783. Forster who visited Faizabad and Lucknow in 1783 writes in one of his letters<sup>27</sup>: "A large portion of the amount paid by Asaf-ud-daula into the Company's treasury is transported from thence in specie to relieve the necessities of Bengal. Much of the wealth accumulated by the servants of the Company residing in Oudh has been conveyed in a similar mode. The channels of commerce operate too tardily for measures which require despatch and embrace only the object of the day . . . these drains, unsupplied by any native source, must soon exhaust the vigour of the country". Hastings succeeded in bringing Benares and Oudh completely within the orbit of the economic system which prevailed in Bengal. In 1787 a report was submitted on the effects of British Investment policy in Oudh. "Previous to the introduction of the Company's investment the trade of the province of Oudh was conducted by the native merchants without any interference on the part of the Government. The markets were open to purchasers of every denomination and the merchant and manufacturer met upon terms of perfect equality. The price of the goods was decided upon the true mercantile principle of one finding it his interest to buy and the other to sell. Advances were seldom given but for some rare commodities. The introduction of the Company's investment caused a revolution in the trade of the country



which has operated greatly to its detriment by the establishment of a system highly unfavourable to the manufacturer and secondly the exclusion of the native merchants"<sup>28</sup>.

*Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and Assam Frontiers :*

Prithvi Narayan, the Gurkha chief, succeeded in making himself the sole ruler of Nepal. He conquered three other rival principalities—Palan, Bhatgong and Kathmandu. By the end of 1768 he reduced all the cities that were holding out. A British attempt to give military assistance to the Niwar King Jaiprakash failed completely. The Kinloch expedition of 1767 which was sent for this purpose could not advance into the interior. But the British thus embittered this all-powerful ruler of Nepal. All those who were connected with Bengal trade—Kashmiris, Gosains and Fakirs—were expelled from Nepal. Even the Capuchin missionaries were forced to withdraw from the Nepal valley. James Logan was sent on a mission to Nepal in 1770 to reopen trade relations. He was to conciliate this powerful ruler. But his mission failed. Raja Prithvi Narayan was very distrustful of the British. Border conflicts became frequent. The new ruler of Nepal had brought under his control almost all the territory between Sarkar Champaran and the foot of the hills. The Terai and the Tanter parganas were occupied by him. This made border conflicts almost inevitable. Raja Coran Sein of Morang was an avowed enemy of the Gurkha chief. Morang was on the northern frontier between the Kosi and the Teessta. He was the leader of the petty hill Rajas and they were anxious to be on friendly terms with the British. This was also a cause of friction between the British and the Nepal Raja. But Morang became very soon politically disturbed and the Sannyasi raiders from Morang carried their plundering raids into the Company's territory. From Nepal also came every year Sannyasi raiders who carried their plundering raids into Bengal. The Gurkha Raja's reply to British protests was that the river Gandak where the Sannyasis crossed over was not in his territory but in that of the Company. He could only stop them if he could extend his jurisdiction upto Gandak. Those raiders normally sought shelter in the Terai region after raiding the Company's territory. It has been said that "Warren Hastings and his wife played an important part in allaying the suspicion of the Raja of Nepal in respect of the Company and making a friend out of an enemy in Prithvi Narayan"<sup>29</sup>. It began in this way. For settling some border disputes the Gurkha Raja sent his wakil Deenanath Upadhyay. While the wakil was in Calcutta a regular correspondence began between the Governor-General and the Nepal chief. Border disputes about Ammerpur and Bijepur were settled. Deenanath went back to Nepal. But further negotiations about disputed borders brought him back to Calcutta. Hastings was then on his way to Benares. Deenanath was asked to follow him. He halted at Patna while Hastings became involved in Chait Singh affair. The Governor-General's wife was



at Patna. In her anxiety for the safety of Hastings she wrote a letter to the Nepal Raja requesting him to send speedy assistance to her husband. The Nepal Raja at once sent an army under Dhonkal Singh. In the meantime Bijaygarh was captured and the Benaras imbroglio was over. Mrs. Hastings told Deenanath that the Gurkha army which had come to Mackwanpore might be sent back. She assured him that she would bring to the notice of the Governor-General his evidence of friendship which he would certainly value very much. The Gurkha army was asked to return. When Hastings came back to Patna he heard all this from his wife. The point at dispute about the pargana of Routehat was settled to the satisfaction of the Nepal government. Anglo-Nepalese political relations took a turn for the better.

Chronic anarchy and disorder prevailed beyond the eastern limits of Bengal. The first eastern state which accepted British paramountcy was Coochbehar. Family feuds exhausted this state. By 1770 Bhutan succeeded in establishing a vague suzerainty over it. But Bhutanese interference in settling succession compelled the Nazir Deo or the chief minister to open negotiations with the British government and a treaty was concluded by which the Company undertook to drive out the Bhutias from Coochbehar in return for an annual tribute. Capt. James advanced and captured the fort of Darling in the hills. The Tashi Lama of Tibet interceded in favour of Bhutan. Peace was concluded and territorial claims between Bhutan and Coochbehar were adjusted. The annual tribute which Coochbehar promised to pay to the East India Company was fixed in 1772 at one lakh Narayani rupees or Rs. 67,700-14-5 in the currency of the Company<sup>30</sup>.

Warren Hastings took this opportunity of intercourse with Tibet and sent George Bogle to Tibet in May 1774 with a view to exploring the possibilities of Anglo-Tibetan trade. Some valuable first-hand information was obtained about Tibet and the possibilities of trade routes. There was another mission under Hamilton in 1779. Though Tashi Lama was willing to cooperate yet trade through Nepal could not be established because Nepal and Tibet were very much opposed to each other and there could not be any negotiation between the two countries on trade. In all the hill states there was deep suspicion of British motives, a feeling perhaps that the merchant would be followed by the soldier. This deep suspicion found its best expression in the declaration of Nirpur Piaga, wakil of the Raja of Bhutan—"Formerly there was an extensive trade between the country of Lhasa and that of Bengal and Hindus and Musalmans used to visit the country freely and carry on business there: but of late the communication has been rendered difficult on account of wars and disturbances. Now Deb Dharma Lama Rimboche and the English Company being united in sincere friendship it has been agreed on both sides that the Deb Raja shall in no way offer any obstruction in their passage or trade to the Hindu and Musalman merchants. These persons, however, shall not be allowed to bring sandal wood, indigo, gogal (fragrant gum



resin), skins, pan and betel-nuts. That no English or European merchants shall be permitted to enter the hills (Bhutan). That the Bhotias who may come to deal in horses and other articles in Bengal shall be subject to no duty on either side"<sup>31</sup>. Hastings sent Foxcroft to Nepal in 1784 with profession of friendship and proposals to establish trade relations and presents. Presumably nothing came out of it. The 'lofty trade lands behind the snowy peaks to the north' remained outside the trade belt of the East India Company in Bengal.

### *Sannyasi and Fakir Raiders :*

Reference has been made to the Sannyasi and Fakir raiders in Bengal. The following description of these people would give an idea of the nature of this source of disorder. "They inhabit or rather possess the country lying south of the hills of Tibet. They go mostly naked. They have neither towns, houses nor families but move continually from place to place, recruiting their numbers with the healthiest children they can steal in the countries through which they pass. Thus they are the stoutest and most active men in India. Many are merchants. They are all pilgrims and held by all castes of Gentoos in great veneration. The infatuation prevents our obtaining any intelligence of their motives . . . they often appear in the heart of the province as if they dropped from heaven"<sup>32</sup>. They established a terrorism, a 'horrid ascendancy' over the people in different parts of North Bengal. After the disruption of life caused by the famine of 1770 they became an organised threat to the administration of the country. This brand of Sadhuism affected also the Muslims. There were armed bands of fakirs who also levied contributions. Purnea, Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Bogra and Rajshahi were the districts most affected. About the end of 1772 Capt. Thomas who was stationed at Rangpur was attacked by a band of these marauders. His pargana sepoy could not make any effective resistance. He was slain in the skirmish. The government had to start an offensive against these Sannyasis. Their suppression suddenly gained in urgency because Capt. Edwards and Sergeant Major Douglas were cut down while leading an attack upon a Sannyasi band in 1773. The pargana battalions were unequal to the task. The Fakir leader Majnu was defeated by Capt. Williams when he reappeared in north Bengal towards the close of 1773. Rangpur suffered considerably in 1774. A treaty concluded by Hastings with the Debraja of Bhutan contained the following clause—"Whatever Sannyasis are considered by the English as an enemy, the Devaraja will not allow them to take shelter in any part of the district now given up nor permit them to enter into the Hon'ble Company's territories or through any part of his and if the Bhutias shall not of themselves be able to drive them out they shall give information to the British Resident at Cooch-behar". Hastings also arranged with Chait Singh to furnish 500 horses to expel the Sannyasis. They assisted the troop of 50 horse raised for



the Governor-General's bodyguard. A corps of light infantry commanded by Capt. Brooke, which was meant for hill service, was employed against the Sannyasis. The problem recurred in some future years but not in such a form as it appeared in 1773. Fakir raiders now created greater disturbance. The Fakirs under Majnu were defeated in north Bengal in 1776. He was compelled to withdraw. In 1783 we find him in Mymensingh. He was defeated and retreated, reappearing occasionally in Rangpur, Bogra and Dinajpur. The last raid of Majnu was in 1786. He died in 1787.

Majnu Shah was the most notorious of the Fakir raiders. He belonged to the Burhana sect of the Madari order of Fakirs. One of his local headquarters in Bengal was at Madargunge near Goail, 12 miles south of Bogra town. Another was at Mahastan. "The no-man's land lying south of the stations of Dinajpur and Rangpur and west of present Bogra towards the Ganges (?) far removed from any local authority was a favourite haunt of the bandits"<sup>33</sup>. His raids compelled some of the zamindars to transfer their homes from these raiding zones and build residences at remote places. One of those who were allied to him was Bhowani Pathak who operated in Bogra-Rangpur-Mymensingh area. He was killed in 1787. Seven boats with arms and ammunition were taken. There is the report of a female leader named Devi Chaudhurani who was in close alliance with Pathak. She lived in boats and had a force of barkandazs in her pay. Bankimchandra's *Devi Chaudhurani* has immortalized the history of the activity of these two persons whose names would otherwise have remained confined to government reports and gazetteers. A poem *Majnur Kabita* was written in 1813 by Panchanan Das<sup>34</sup>, twenty six years after Majnu's death. It gives an impression of the terror which he created in the countryside. With active measure taken by Hastings these raids began to diminish but they did not disappear altogether until about the end of the eighteenth century.

There was a wave of anarchy in Assam which made it necessary for Lord Cornwallis to send a detachment under Capt. Walsh to restore order in the border region. The principal officers of the Assam king—the three Gohains, the Bara Barua and the Bara Phukan and the feudatory chiefs like the Rajas of Darrang, Rani and Beltola created so much disruption in Assam that the new king Gourinath Sinha, who ascended the throne in 1780, was unable to stem the tide of anarchy. He had also to cope with the Moamaria rebellion of the rabbles in the east and the raids of the Bengal *Barkandazs* of Krishna Narayan in Darrang and Kamrup. In his distress the Raja appealed to Cornwallis because the Bengal *Barkandazs* had been openly recruited from the British territory. Cornwallis sent Walsh with three hundred and sixty sepoy to restore peace. Gaurinath had been driven out of Gauhati which was recovered by Walsh. The Darrang prince Krishna Narayan was attacked and forced to flee across the Bhutan frontier. But he returned to Walsh's camp and peace was concluded through the good offices of Walsh between



the Ahom king and the Darrang prince. Walsh was getting ready to embark on an expedition against the Moamarias when Sir John Shore, successor of Cornwallis, true to the policy of non-intervention, asked Walsh to return. The forces of anarchy had a new lease of life in Assam.

#### *Anglo-Nepalese Relations 1792-1793 :*

In Nepal Prithvi Narayan was succeeded by Singh Pratap who ruled from 1775 to 1778. His successor Ran Bahadur was a militant ruler. British relations with both of them were cordial. An attempt to establish trade relations with Nepal was now more successful. Maulvi Abdul Qadir Khan, Munsif of the Dewani Adalat of Benares, was sent to Nepal with presents for Raja Ran Bahadur in 1792. Through the good offices of Gajaraj Misra, Nepal Raja's *guru* or spiritual guide, he could disarm court suspicion. A treaty of commerce was concluded with Nepal on 1st March, 1792. 2½ p.c. duty was to be taken by both countries reciprocally on imports. Credit for this success should go to Jonathan Duncan, Resident at Benares<sup>35</sup>.

Ran Bahadur was anxious to extend his dominion to Tibet. His army advanced as far as Lhasa and occupied it. The Chinese came to the help of the Lhasa government. The Dalai Lama, the Nepal Raja and Chan Chuan, the Chinese commander-in-chief, who drove out the Nepal king's army from Lhasa, appealed for assistance to the British<sup>36</sup>. The Nepal king's request was for 10 guns and 10 artillery officers<sup>37</sup>. Cornwallis naturally followed the policy of neutrality. The Dalai Lama was informed that "the English do not want to infringe the rules of friendship by interfering in a hostile manner in the disputes prevailing among foreign powers except to secure their own defence against wanton attack". But he offered to mediate between Nepal and China because the British were friendly with both. The Governor-General offered to mediate<sup>38</sup> and send Capt. Kirkpatrick for this purpose. No reply was received. In the meantime severe engagements took place between the Nepalese and Chinese armies. The Chinese army approached Kathmandu. The Raja of Nepal sued for peace and restored the booty and prisoners he had taken at Lhasa. He also deputed his chief minister Deo Dutt to China with costly presents. Kirkpatrick had in the meantime proceeded on his mission and come to Patna when Ran Bahadur asked him not to proceed any further because peace had been concluded. Two Nepal vakils came to Patna for exchange of views. Kirkpatrick was allowed to proceed to Nepal. He met the Nepal Raja at Nagarcot. Sentiments of mutual friendship were exchanged. Deenanath Upadhaya was again deputed as Nepal wakil to Calcutta<sup>39</sup>.

#### *First Anglo-Maratha War and the Quadruple Alliance War of 1780-1782 :*

Warren Hastings was not only eager to secure the frontier of Bengal but he wanted also to intervene in the war and diplomacy of the Maratha



empire. He did not get any assistance from the subordinate presidencies. It has been said that Bombay government would do at every crisis what was exactly the thing that should not have been done and the Madras government followed this example. The Bombay government supported Raghunath Rao. The idea of Hastings was to detach Berar from the Maratha confederacy. "Why not sweep away the usurpation of the Peshwa?" He wanted to set up in the person of Mudhoji a new Maratha royal line in the very heart of India "a kingdom owing its inception to the Company and bound to it by chains of gratitude"—another Oudh. With this view he sent Elliot to Nagpur but the brisk activity of the Bombay government for Raghunath Rao compelled him to send messengers asking Elliot not to raise this subject and to speak only about the passage of a British army through Berar and an ordinary alliance<sup>40</sup>. Elliot died, negotiations lapsed, Leslie, who was in charge of the Bundelkhand force, bungled and after him Goddard his successor took up negotiations but the disastrous Convention of Wadgaon (January, 1779) was a resounding Maratha triumph and British prestige slumped throughout India. There was a general feeling that British power was not stable. The French circulated the news of British defeats in America. So Hastings could not do anything on these lines. "He had played for a strong central position from which to command his enemies' lines of communication and had lost"<sup>41</sup>.

But Hastings was very much aware of the inveterate propensity of the Bhonsles of Nagpur to range on the side of the enemies of the Peshwas and it was always a source of weakness to the general cause of the Maratha nation. "He wanted to thrust himself into this line of cleavage. He succeeded in neutralising the Bhonsle with a bribe during the First Anglo-Maratha War"<sup>42</sup>. When it became merged in a general combination of Indian powers against the Company—The Peshwa, Haidar Ali, Nizam Ali and the Bhonsle Raja—the golden diplomacy was again at work. "The enormously extended southern frontier of British Bengal would have required half a million men in arms ever on the alert if it was to be sealed effectually against the myriads of light horsemen and Pindari looters that a word from Nagpur could have let loose on any part of it. And such a break through, however short and ineffective in its military effect, would have done incalculable loss to the economic life and settled order of the southern district of Bengal, Bihar and Allahabad"<sup>43</sup>.

Hastings wanted to safeguard this southern frontier from incursions and he also wanted to send troops and supply of provision from Bengal through Cuttack to the Carnatic. The sea route was risky on account of French naval activity. As a member of the grand anti-British alliance Mudhoji sent an army under his son Chimnaji to invade Bengal through Cuttack. Hastings succeeded in foiling this plan. "The needy Chimnaji Bhonsle secretly informed Hastings of the directions received from Poona and assured him that he was going to circumvent them by marching at a



snail slow pace from Nagpur to Cuttack and that instead of making an immediate dash into Bengal he would engage in a long harassing campaign against the Raja of Dhenkanal so that Bengal would enjoy a long respite. A Bengal force under T.D. Pearce marched through Orissa, received every assistance and supplies from Chimnaji's agents. This friendly neutrality was purchased cheaply for 16 lakhs of rupees—3 lakhs in October, 1780 and 13 lakhs advanced as a loan to his envoy Raja Ram Pandit at Calcutta<sup>44</sup>.

Nana Farnavis, the director of Maratha foreign policy, sensed the danger inherent in British policy towards the Maratha confederacy whether it originated from Bombay or Calcutta. He was determined to thwart attempts to raise puppets like Raghunath Rao or Mudhoji, who were to play the part that Mir Jafar had played in Bengal and Muhammad Ali in the Carnatic. The Nizam had grievances against the British. He won over Mudhoji Bhonsle. Nana Farnavis had come to an understanding with Haidar Ali. British policy of interference in Maratha affairs was seeking fresh openings. Haidar's approaches to Nana Farnavis were met half way. The Maratha-Mysore anti-British alliance developed into a quadruple alliance against the British, Haiderabad and Nagpur joining it. But, as it has been shown, Hastings succeeded in neutralising the Bhonsle chief who was from the beginning a very shaky member of the alliance. The Nizam was also very soon conciliated. He wrote to the Governor-General: "As your answer was late in arriving and in the meanwhile the violence of the Governor and Council of Madras increased I was on the eve of revenging them as was proper when your letter arrived and on the perusal of the explicit contents of it I put a stop to my preparations"<sup>45</sup>. He practically withdrew from the alliance. Hastings was trying to isolate Haidar Ali by detaching his allies. British arms penetrated into the heart of Sindhia's territory and forced him to open negotiations in August, 1781. A treaty was concluded with Sindhia on the 13th October, 1781, and Sindhia promised to mediate peace between the British and the Poona government. Nana Farnavis candidly avowed that the Peshwa was in reality Haidar's enemy but as a treaty of alliance had been made and there was no failure on his part, the inclusion of Haidar Ali was a necessary preliminary in any treaty of peace. He delayed ratification in the hope perhaps of persuading Haidar to restore some of the Maratha territories he had annexed. Haidar died suddenly on the 20th December, 1782. The treaty was then ratified by the Poona government. Haidar's successor concluded a separate treaty. Tipu's treaty of Mangalore of 11th March, 1784 makes no mention of the treaty of Salbai.

British military operations in different parts of India created financial difficulties for the administration of Warren Hastings. The resources of Bombay were not sufficient even for a peace establishment. The extreme poverty of that Presidency made it necessary for Bengal to maintain all field forces. Even in peace time the presidency of Bombay had drained all channels of loan and had been sinking in arrears very deeply. When in





addition the administration of Warren Hastings had to find money for war in the Carnatic he wrote, "Our expenses have been increasing: our means declining. And it is now a painful duty imposed upon me to propose that we should again have recourse to the means of supplying our growing wants by taking up money at interest". Warren Hastings had recourse to some crude methods to relieve his financial distress. Benares and Oudh were his victims. But Lord Hastings later also dipped his hands into the treasury of Oudh at the time of the Anglo-Nepalese War and Amherst had also recourse to an Oudh loan at the time of the Anglo-Burmese War. Oudh was for many years the anchor of British Indian war finance and Hastings showed the way.

#### *Political Developments 1784-1793 :*

On the foreign policy of Hastings Wilson writes, "To the principles of his foreign policy no shadow of guilt can be attached. The times were critical . . . great firmness was demanded and its excess was a venial error when its deficiency would have been an inexpressible crime"<sup>46</sup>. The 17th, 18th and 19th articles of the Impeachment charges against Warren Hastings criticized his foreign policy during the years 1784-85. He was accused of conniving at the designs of Sindhia—consolidating in the hands of Mahadji Sindhia all the legal sovereignty of India. His reply deserves to be quoted: "I declare that I entered into no negotiations with Mahadji Sindhia for delivering the Mughal into the hands of the Marathas. But I must have been a mad man indeed if I had involved the Company in a war with the Marathas because the Mughal as his last resources had thrown himself under the protection of Mahadji Sindhia". Hastings had sent his agent Major Brown to Delhi Court and there was for some time a talk of assisting the Mughal Emperor but the proposition to grant him assistance was 'disrelished' by the Council. When Hastings was at Lucknow in 1784 the heir-apparent of the Mughal Emperor came to Oudh to secure British assistance against the warring factions in the Mughal court. But Hastings told him that this was not possible in view of the opposition of his colleagues and the prevailing temper of the British nation. He advised him to depend upon Sindhia. Hastings also thought of the danger from the Sikhs and expected the Marathas at Delhi under the leadership of Mahadji Sindhia to act as a buffer against them in their own interest. This would secure the Oudh frontier. In his minute of the 4th December, 1784 Hastings recorded his opinion of the rising Sikh power. He regarded the Sikh power extending from the most western branch of Attock to the walls of Delhi as a new object worthy of serious contemplation. He visualized a change in their polity, the rise of an individual of rare capacity and enterprise who would succeed in enveloping everything within his own supremacy. He feared that a new dominion would ascend from the ashes of the Mughal empire and wanted to prevent such a calamity to British imperialism by 'seasonable means of opposition'.



He must have thought that the Maratha power at Delhi would be a check upon the Sikh spirit of adventure. He could not also be altogether oblivious of the Durrani menace.

The third Anglo-Mysore War began in May, 1790. Madras was unprepared. Everything had to be done in Bengal. There was a heavy drain of silver from Bengal. Debts increased. Under the military necessity of transferring funds and supplies to Madras and Bombay Cornwallis thought of developing the 'country' trade of Bengal and abolishing the import duties at Bombay and Madras. He therefore established free coastal trade between the Presidencies.

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## ADMINISTRATIVE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY : 1757-1793.

### *Sovereignty (1757-1793)*

Mughal imperium in Bengal received two rude shocks in quick succession when Clive re-captured Calcutta and won the battle of Plassey. But in Clive's treaty with Mir Jafar the theory of Mughal sovereignty was not formally impaired. Clive, however, made the confusion of de jure sovereignty and de facto imperium more confounded by accepting the Diwani in 1765 and handing over the administration to a Naib Diwan. The Court of Directors did not want formal sovereignty. That would precipitate state intervention in England. Clive also wanted to hoodwink the French and the Dutch in India. A vague indefinite situation was thus created which cannot be explained by the use of western terminology.

In the chapter on Sovereignty in *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, Dodwell analyses the Regulating Act of 1773 and the India Acts of 1784 and 1793 and comes to the conclusion that we do not find the claim to sovereignty fully asserted until 1813. "But at which moment that sovereignty came into being still remained a riddle". Instead of studying developments in England if we study developments in India we find that treaties concluded by the East India Company with successive Subahdars of Bengal mark some of the stages in the transfer of sovereignty. These treaties and the regulations giving effect to the transfer of functions enable us to trace the gradual concentration of powers and functions in the hands of the East India Company until in the days of Cornwallis British sovereignty in Bengal came fully into being. By 1790 the Nawab was *functus officio*. After 1793 only some vestiges of old Mughal sovereignty were left. Coinage continued in the name of the Mughal Emperor until 1835.

British hesitation to assume formal sovereignty was responsible for various developments that confused the issue in the seventies of the eighteenth century. In 1769 Verelst said in his farewell message, "We have reached that supreme line, which, to pass, would be an open avowal of sovereignty . . . there is a middle way where moderation must guide and continue us . . . exteriors should be regarded as essentials". But in 1772 masterful Warren Hastings succeeded weak Cartier. Hastings received orders from the Court of Directors 'to stand forth as Diwan' by which he understood that he was to 'assume openly the management of the Diwani without any foreign intervention'. The Court's letter of 28th August, 1771 which communicated this momentous decision was not accompanied by any instructions. Hastings was thus left free to interpret in his own way and he definitely aimed at introducing English



sovereignty. He refused to pay tribute to the Mughal Emperor, declined to receive any title from him and even talked with Shuja-ud-daula of Oudh about his coining money in Oudh in the name of the English monarch. He abolished the post of Naib Diwan. His revenue and judicial reforms and his transfer of all the offices to Calcutta entitled him to claim that 'the sovereign authority of the Company is firmly rooted in every branch of the state'. He assured the Court of Directors . . . . "the greatest care has been taken in selecting persons for these courts. Their appointment has been confirmed by *Sanads* from the Nabob for the sake of preserving the ancient and constitutional forms of the country government and their sentence in capital cases will be transmitted to him for a warrant for execution . . . . Continuance of these forms might have been considered as too great a concession to the Nabob and a dangerous acknowledgement of his superiority. But the objections can have no weight at present as the Nabob is entirely under the control of government"<sup>2</sup>. Hastings preserved forms and transferred functions. He brought all the institutions under the control of the Governor and Council at Calcutta and made the Nabob a 'phantom'. The Sadar Nizamat Adalat was established at Calcutta before the close of the year 1773. Sadr-ul-Huq Khan, Daroga of the Sadar Nizamat Adalat, received a delegation of the Nazim's authority. But the Governor acted as the Superintendent of the administration of criminal justice, thus taking over the most important function of the Nazim. All this was as near as possible to an open avowal of sovereignty.

But at this stage the Regulating Act supervened. It made a distinction in hesitating language between British subjects and native inhabitants. The majority of the Council—Francis, Clavering and Monson—shared the view of the Court of Directors, of Clive and of Verelst. Hastings would preserve forms but take over functions; the majority would not only respect forms but also wanted the country government to function. Warren Hastings had outrun the intentions of his masters and had to face the refusal of the foreign companies to respect this assumption of new authority. In one of the letters to the Court of Directors there is a reference to the foreigners in Bengal and 'their obstinate perseverance on all occasions to exempt themselves from being affected by any of our regulations'<sup>3</sup>. In October, 1775 the 'majority' again conferred the office of Naib Nazim on Muhammad Reza Khan. Thus the theory of Mughal sovereignty was once again revived, so far as it could be revived.

But the 'majority' had now to reckon with the Supreme Court. In the case of *Rai Radha Charan*, Robert Chambers, one of the puisne judges, expressed an opinion which exactly corresponded to the situation. He said, "I do not think myself obliged unnecessarily to decide that the King my master is not sovereign of these provinces and to decide that he is I would wish likewise to avoid because the Parliament seems cautiously to avoid it". But other judges were not so undecided. Hyde and Lemaistre were emphatic in their views that the Nawab did not



possess the attributes of sovereignty. Impey asserted that the Nawab had surrendered all power into the hands of the Company.

In his notes Justice Hyde exposes the inconsistencies of conduct and doctrine of the Chief Justice in the case of Kamal-ud-din vs. the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, in the case against Coja Gavorke Simon and in other causes. At first Impey was ready to control and overturn acts done under the Company's power. Then again if any mention would be made of the Provincial Chiefs and Councils of the *Diwany Adalat* he would say, "What are the Provincial Councils? Prove by what authority they act? What is the *Diwany Adalat*? I do not know. If they have any judicial authority prove from what it is derived". According to Hyde, Impey changed his views in his anxiety to overturn acts done under the Company's authority but when Hastings came to dominate, Impey was anxious to support Hastings. But the fight between the 'majority' and the judges of the Supreme Court headed by Impey had lasted long enough for Hastings to change his views on sovereignty to some extent. As Hyde puts it, "Though Hastings wished to support Kamal against Clavering yet he wished more to support the authority of the revenue Committee which was of his own establishment". The Supreme Court had taken advantage of the ambiguous language of the Regulating Act to extend its jurisdiction and its rights and powers were such that against its acts there could be no relief but by instituting a case in that Court and by an appeal to the King in Council. Hastings and Impey were very much in agreement on the question of sovereignty in 1775 but later, on this question, they very much disagreed with each other. This was perhaps so because 'the love of power is a natural passion strongly implanted in the hearts of all statesmen like Mr. Hastings'.<sup>4</sup>

Referring to the attempt of the Supreme Court to extend its jurisdiction and encroach on Mughal sovereignty the Council wrote to the Court of Directors, "There was a rule, a declaration in form that a plea to the jurisdiction should not deprive the party who made it of his right of pleading to the action. But the obvious jealousy which all men feel for their own power and consequence served rather to intimidate than encourage the use of such pleas. There were persons who would venture to make this but to this hour it has never come to our knowledge that they were ever brought to trial. The sense of the Court has been expressed in loose and extra-judicial intimations but the right itself has never been brought to a decision". The Supreme Court created a very difficult situation by asserting that the allowed jurisdiction could not be effectual without a temporary jurisdiction over persons whom the law declared to be wholly exempt from it. But the climax was reached when civil process was issued against the Naib Nazim. In the case of Rai Radha Charan in 1775 Warren Hastings told the judges of the Supreme Court that the Nazim was a mere pageant. He was anxious to secure the conviction of the accused, a son-in-law of his personal enemy Maharaja Nandakumar. But when civil process was issued against the Naib Nazim





the Governor-General in Council—Hastings was at that time uncontrolled by opposition—wrote to the Court of Directors (27th January, 1780) that there was universal consternation caused by the 'vehement and unremitting effort' to establish the indiscriminate subjection of the people of the provinces to the authority of the Supreme Court. Hastings must have revised his ideas on sovereignty. The Court of Directors was told—"and here it is worth attention that in him upon whom from so unlooked for a source this complication of dishonor and distress has fallen resides the whole executive power of the country government, that he is also the Chief Magistrate of Criminal Jurisdiction throughout the provinces whose powers though the legislature was apprized of them statute has not abridged and which by being tolerated we apprehend was legalized, that representing as he does what remains of the Majesty of the Empire in these Subahs and the exercise of his authority being the only present means of preserving peace and order throughout the country, it should, in common policy, till some substitute is provided, be permitted, we think, to remain in all possible vigour and respect".

The Act of Parliament passed in 1781 found a remedy for this state of things and made a clear distinction between the Supreme Court and the 'courts dependent on the country constitution'. It explained the phrase 'British subject' in such a way as to leave no room for ambiguity. Here we can conveniently recount the functions still left to the Nazim. Coinage was still in the name of Shah Alam II. The Nazim, through the Naib Nazim Muhammad Reza Khan, still exercised criminal justice, signed death warrants and conferred titles and honours. Other European settlements still recognised his authority, refused to recognise the jurisdiction of the courts of the Company and took advantage of the weakness of the country government to give shelter to criminals and debtors. The Governor-General and Council felt the disadvantage of this situation and had actually written thus to the Court of Directors in January, 1776—"The grievance is severely felt unless the country government shall be supported or unless the sovereignty of the country shall be clearly and avowedly placed in other hands we know not how this mischief can be removed unless by an exertion of that part of the executive power still left with the Subahdar for which this government according to some authorities might be deemed answerable". But by 1781 the opponents of Hastings on the Council had 'sickened, died and fled'. Hastings had also won over Impey by offering him 'the charge and superintendency of the office of Sudder Diwani Adalat'. He could therefore resume his 'plan to extrude the native sovereignty by exhausting its functions'<sup>6</sup>. After 1781 Hastings made good progress in the realization of his plan and more than made up for the delay caused by the bickerings during the years 1774-1781.

England entered upon a struggle for empire in 1778. Her principal European enemy was France. Holland also declared war in 1782. Peace was not concluded until about the end of 1783. These foreign traders



again came to trade in Bengal in 1784-85. But the position which they had occupied in Bengal before the outbreak of the war was no longer theirs after the conclusion of the new treaties. They absolutely depended on the English East India Company for their investment, particularly their supply of saltpetre. In 1781 Hastings also brought the Faujdari Adalats again to a large extent under his control. The Sadar Nizamat Adalat had been sent back to Murshidabad and placed under Naib Nazim Muhammad Reza Khan. Under him the faujdari courts were exercising their magisterial functions and the zamindars were exercising police jurisdiction. In April, 1781 the Council decided that the system of faujdars and thanadars was not satisfactory and the newly created Diwani Judges in eighteen districts would act as magistrates, would apprehend criminals within their jurisdiction and send them to the nearest faujdari adalat but with a charge in writing. Under the Governor-General a separate department was re-established at the Presidency to receive from the magistrates as also from the Naib Nazim monthly returns of the proceedings of the faujdari courts. A covenanted servant was appointed who got the appellation of Remembrancer to the Criminal Courts. Thus the Governor-General became the supervisor of the supervisor of criminal justice, the Naib Nazim. All that was necessary for Cornwallis to do in 1790 was to ask the Naib Nazim to quit and to entrust the Courts of Circuit he created with the task of dealing with the criminals in the first instance.

In March, 1793 the Calcutta Council recommended to the Court of Directors that Calcutta town duties should be abolished and the Government customs duties of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent should be re-established to remove an inducement for merchants to trade from or deposit their goods in the foreign settlements in preference to Calcutta. They admitted that this might appear objectionable to the French and the Dutch but they argued "as you have resolved not to allow your rights of sovereignty in this country to be disputed it is well worth your serious consideration". In connection with the Decennial Settlement they informed the Court of Directors (6th March, 1793) that in the engagements with the landholders it was expressly laid down that "you do not mean by fixing the public demand upon the lands to debar yourselves from the exercise of the right inherent in you as sovereign of the country of making such regulations as you think proper for the protection of the ryots or inferior landholders".

Whatever the Charter Acts might indicate the process of exhausting the functions was completed in India by 1790 and between 1790 and 1793 the foreign traders in Bengal as also the people of Bengal were made to feel that nothing was left to the Nabob but an empty title and the privilege of conferring empty titles that made him look all the more ridiculous.

When Mubarrak-ud-daula died on September 6, 1793 no treaty was concluded with his successor Nasir-ul-Mulk and credentials were granted to him by the Governor-General in Council on the part of the Company





and on behalf of King Shah Alam. Lord Lake entered Delhi on September 16, 1803. Wellesley did not sign any treaty or engagement with Shah Alam II but he made permanent provision for the support of the emperor and his family. The Mughal emperor thus ceased to be the suzerain of the Company. Thus did Mughal sovereignty make its exit in 1803.

#### *Administration 1757-1772.*

During Mir Jafar's first administration 1757-1760, his indolence and his lack of attention to business resulted in relaxation in the place of old vigilance which had made the Qanungo Daftar the sheet anchor of Mughal revenue administration. The old efficiency of the *Khalsa* or exchequer which had energized revenue administration in the days of Murshid Quli, Shujauddin and Alivardi very soon became a thing of the past. Mir Jafar has been described as talking of business rather 'with the incoherence and insensibility of a man loitering his time in a tapping shop'. He did not "bestow one single thought on the necessity of settling the country, regulating the finances, quieting the clamours of the army or easing the husbandman"<sup>7</sup>. His successor Mir Qasim was conspicuous for his exactitude and keenness, his ability to understand 'the intricacies of the affairs of government and especially the knotty mysteries of finance'<sup>8</sup>, but he was in a hurry to collect as much revenue as he could for his war with the British which became inevitable. It has been estimated that his impositions amounted to more than 76 lakhs of rupees per annum. But all these additional levies could not possibly be collected. The balance in public accounts, after three years of his administration, amounted to Rs. 79,94,065<sup>9</sup>. He was not in a position to respect ancient usages. He could not pay heed to the *qanun* or old traditions which the qanungos interpreted and which restrained the government no less than its amils and zamindars. The old system with its respect for *asal Jumma* or standard revenue was practically superseded because of the pressure which was brought to bear upon the amils for the maximization of revenue collection. The qanungo secretariat was completely neglected. "Their functions were totally abolished during the time of Cossim Ali Khan"<sup>10</sup>. He also tried as far as possible to intercept intermediate profits (*towfir*). In Mir Jafar's second administration the sadar qanungos and naib qanungos were asked to resume their traditional role. The central qanungo secretariat began to function in the old way but it was not so easy to regain the prestige or efficiency which they had once enjoyed as the most valued department of the government. The 'symmetry, convenience and simplicity of the old structure of government' were thus already endangered when the era of Double Government began.

From 1765 to 1772 there was Double Government, the East India Company being in charge of the Diwani, the nominal Nawab assisted



by Md. Reza Khan, a nominee of the British as the Naib Nazim, being in charge of the Nizamat. The Nawab was not to maintain an army. He was to be paid the annual sum of sicca rupees 5,386,131 for the support of the Nizamat. Of this sum Rs. 36,07,277 was to be allotted for maintenance of troops for 'the support of my dignity only' and this expenditure was also controlled by the British. In 1760 Mir Qasim had already ceded to the Company the lands of Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong 'for all charges of the Company and of the army and provisions for the field'. Md. Reza Khan, as Naib Nazim, was to supervise the administration of criminal justice and police. But he was also appointed Naib Diwan. The Company was to accept the revenues of Bengal and control and collect customs. They were already established in the ceded districts—Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong of which they had been in the direct management of the revenues since 1760. Md. Reza Khan as Naib Diwan of the rest of Bengal was placed under the supervision of a very senior servant of the Company, the Resident at the *Durbar*. There had been Residents at the *Durbar* before the grant of the Diwani. But the post became 'practically a new one' from 1765. Francis Sykes, Resident at the *Durbar*, from 1765 to 1767—superintended the collection and disposal of revenues under the inspection and control of the Select Committee at Calcutta. He was to forward all correspondence with the natives to the President and Council at Calcutta to be transmitted to the Court of Directors. The Diwani business was kept separate from that of the former possessions. The Resident at the *Durbar* also inspected the Courts of Justice at Murshidabad. He was 'to interfere as there should be occasion'. Sykes was eager 'to make the Company appear as a principal in many measures or acts of government'. Clive's idea of Double Government was that the East India Company should be the "spring which concealed under the shadow of the Nabob's name secretly gives motion to this vast machine of government without offering violence to the original constitution"<sup>11</sup>. But it is in the nature of power to be encroaching and aggressive and there was a train of consecutive aggressions. The country government was not checkmated with all its pieces on the board.

Reza Khan's administration (1765-1772) was not strong enough to stand independent of the Company. The Naib Diwan felt that his continued existence depended on his ability to collect as much revenue as he could. The amils were called upon by him to pay a fixed sum and those among them who offered the highest were preferred. This new *amildari* system, a variant of *sadar* farming, practically superseded the old system of checks and balances. This has been described as 'a destructive plan'<sup>12</sup>. The *chaudhuris* disappeared from land revenue administration. The amils selected their agents—subordinate farmers of revenue for all practical purposes. A continued demand for more and more impoverished the zamindars. Becher, who succeeded Sykes as Resident at the *Durbar*, insisted upon the Naib Diwan's sending such persons as would be selected



by him to act as subordinate collectors of revenue under the amils. He hoped that his nominees as subordinate collectors would serve as checks upon the amils who were nominees of Reza Khan. He strove in this way to create a new system of checks. But the fundamental cause of all ills was the continued demand for more. "All concerned were interested in gaining credit by an increase of revenue during the time of their being in station without attending to future consequences"<sup>13</sup>. The *Jumma* which was collected was not the regular produce of the country.

Verelst, who succeeded Clive as Governor, decided to put an end to *amildari* administration. Junior servants of the Company were appointed as Supervisors of Revenue in 1769 in the principal districts of the Diwani portion of Bengal—Dacca, Hughli, Birbhum, Tippera, Purnea, Dinajpur, Jessore, Nadia, Rajmahal, Bhagalpur, Rajshahi and Rangpur. Recall of amils was the next step. The Supervisors were to collect a summary history of the districts entrusted to them. Each of them was to report on the conditions and capacity of his district. Each of them was to make a study of the existing revenue-roll and 'bring his investigation home to the zamindar'. The Supervisors were to procure 'a list of the pattaahs as distributed to every ryot' and take cognisance of the demands made on the ryots. They were to regulate commerce of the respective districts entrusted to their charge and to enforce justice.

"You will be his (Ryot's) refuge and the redeemer of his wrongs"—this was one of the instructions of Verelst to the Supervisors. This grandiloquent language, these noble ideals, appear to us as ridiculous when we find that Verelst allowed the Supervisors to carry on private trade unhampered by any regulations. He only expressed a pious hope that they would avoid all interested views of commerce—"Aim at no undue influence yourself and check it in all others". But they were not conspicuous for 'integrity, disinterestedness, assiduity and watchfulness', qualities which, according to Verelst, were very necessary in these new administrators. The Supervisors were placed under the Resident at the *Durbar*. They became so much engrossed in monopolising the inland trade of the districts and they were so much inclined to exploit their own privileged position that the system of Supervisorship became completely discredited in 1770. Though some high ideals were enunciated the Supervisors who superseded the amils made the administrative set-up perhaps worse than before. They were completely under the influence of their banians because they attached the greatest importance to their privileged private trade. The Court of Directors wrote in April, 1773: "As the sending our junior servants into the provinces as Supervisors has not been attended with the wished for success but has enabled them to monopolize the whole trade of the country we therefore direct they may be withdrawn as soon as possible".

New machinery of administration could not as yet advantageously replace the old. Comptrolling Councils of Revenue were formed at Murshidabad and Patna in July, 1770, the Resident to the *Durbar* be-



coming President of the Comptrolling Councils of Revenue at Murshidabad. Besides the Resident there were three other members. In 1765 a single servant of the Company was entrusted with the superintendence of revenue. In 1769 the appointment of Supervisors thus throwing power suddenly into the hands of ignorant inexperienced men did not correct the evils. A Comptrolling Committee of Revenue was formed at Calcutta and it assembled in that capacity on 1st April, 1771. It replaced the Select Committee which was a general executive body. This new body served to control revenue matters only. But the Court of Directors' decision to stand forth as Diwan was received in Calcutta on 14th April, 1772. The Company's servants were asked to take upon themselves 'the entire care and management of the revenues'. Under instructions from the Court of Directors Warren Hastings removed Naib Diwan Md. Reza Khan from Murshidabad and Shitab Roy from Patna. The Comptrolling Council of Revenue at Murshidabad disappeared. The Supervisors became known as Collectors. The *Khalsa* was removed to Calcutta. A Revenue Board consisting of the whole Council was constituted at Calcutta in October, 1772. In November, 1773 the Collectors were removed and five Provincial Councils were set up in Bengal—at Calcutta, Murshidabad, Burdwan, Dinajpur and Dacca. The Provincial Councils were composed of five members each, a chief and four senior servants of the Company, with a native Diwan to assist the Council. Native amils in the districts reappeared for a few years. But these amils under the Provincial Councils were merely *gomastahs* or agents. They were not like those officers who had functioned during the period 1765-1770 or those who had assisted Mughal administration before 1757. Provincial Councils were abolished in 1781. British collectors took over revenue administration of the districts. The amils and diwans of Provincial Councils disappeared. A Committee of Revenue was formed in Calcutta with five senior servants of the Company. This body was transformed into a Board of Revenue in 1786. The Qanungo department had gradually withered away because of neglect and this office was abolished after the conclusion of the Permanent Settlement. The Sadar Qanungos, naib qanungos and their agents disappeared. The Roy Royan, the Diwan of the Committee of Revenue, the Karkun in the Central Secretariat were all swept away. In civil administration the exclusion of Indians from top ranks in the Central Secretariat from important posts in district administration was completed by Cornwallis. The Indians lost all voice in revenue administration. Native disabilities became an established and accepted feature, a root principle of British Indian administration. The door was securely locked and barred—"No Indians need apply".

The hinge of the administration of Justice and Police in Bengal was the zamindar. Zamindars in their *cutchery* decided criminal cases not of a capital nature. In civil suits they took cognisance of all causes between party and party. They were entitled to a fourth or a fifth of what was decreed. They also decided disputes relating to rent. They could



impose petty fines. An appeal to the Nabob at Murshidabad was never precluded if the aggrieved party could purchase the government's favour or protection. The prevailing practice in Bengal was to 'refer matters of controversy to arbitrators chosen by parties'<sup>14</sup>. As Elphinstone wrote about Baji Rao's administration in Maharashtra, 'the poor were left to do and they did justice to themselves'. The Diwan seldom exercised his appellate jurisdiction relating to real estates and landed property in person. The Daroga-i-Adalat Diwani or the Deputy of the Diwan decided all cases relating to landed property. There were no regular courts of justice in the interior. Government officers of revenue and zamindari officers decided petty civil suits as also criminal cases. The zamindar or an officer of the zamindar presided over the caste cutchery. Normally the caste cutchery took cognisance of "all causes with respect to caste such as persons having lost their caste or any disputes relating to marriage". The customary punishments were 'to give an entertainment to friends and to pay the expense of the persons who are placed over them and this is levied in proportion to their faults'<sup>15</sup>.

Non-muslims were excluded from all share in the administration of criminal justice. At the advent of British rule in Bengal the penal law in force was Muhammadan law. Even after 1765 the administration of criminal justice continued as before, Qazis and Muftis being responsible for the *fatwa* or interpretation. The authoritative writings of Abu Hanifa and his disciples Abu Yusuf and Imam Muhammad governed these judicial decisions. When they did not find any precedent in these authorities they sought it in the decision of subsequent lawyers. Certain distinctions of this penal code should be noticed—*kessas* or retaliation (blood for blood), *deyut* (price of blood), *hudud* (prescribed penalties), *tazeer*, *seasut*, *akoot-but* (discretionary correction and chastisement). How the theory worked can be explained by reference to judicial decisions: 'a sentence is properly established when it is founded on the will of the heirs of the murdered man'. "Kessas appertains to human rights in like manner as property"—so wrote some Qazis and muftis. The next of the kin of the murdered man enjoyed this privilege under Muhammadan law. Mutilation was also a feature of muslim criminal justice. In inflicting punishment great importance was attached to the manner in which the crime was committed and the instrument used. Intention was not so much taken into consideration. The evidence of women and *zimmis* (non-muslims) in cases of murder was considered invalid. For forgery punishment was 39 stripes and a short term of imprisonment. For theft and burglary 39 stripes and a short term imprisonment formed also the usual punishment. But qazis and muftis took a more serious view of dacoity and highway robbery and usually sentenced highway robbers to imprisonment for an indefinite period. Confessions played an important part in decisions. *Fatwas* declared that denial after confession was not proper. These confessions were pretty often extorted by *goindas* and *girdwars*. Even if confessions were not substantiated by a single witness undue importance was attached to confessions.



In the settled areas of Bengal there were faujdari adalats at Murshidabad, Chitpore, Dacca, Sylhet, Burdwan, Hughli, Krishnagar, Bhagulpur, Rajmahal, Hijli and Purnea (after 1765). There were no regular appellate courts. Faujdars under the Mughals were placed in disturbed frontier districts or in those areas where there were refractory zamindars. Their special care was to watch overgrown zamindars so that they might 'carry on their shoulders the trappings of submission'. Another business of Faujdars was to 'give chase to banditti and highwaymen'. There were faujdari stations in Chittagong, Sylhet, Rangpur, Rangamati, Purnea, Rajmahal, Rajshahi, Midnapur, Hugli and Burdwan. Dacca had a Naib Nazim with a police staff of his own<sup>16</sup>. The Maharaja of Burdwan succeeded in securing faujdari jurisdiction in his own zamindari. But generally speaking the principal zamindars were the hinges of all public business in their own lands. This system broke down completely during the period 1757-1770. It should, however, be mentioned that Darogas of Faujdari Adalats should not be confused with Faujdars.

Zamindars became impoverished during the years 1760-1770. The famine of 1770 almost completed this exhaustion. Disorganization and dislocation became widespread in North Bengal and West Bengal. Lawlessness became rampant. Large tracts of North Bengal returned to jungle. These extensive jungles became excellent retreats for Sannyasi raiders who carried on depredations in North Bengal districts. The Collector of Hughli reported in 1773 that dacoits bid defiance to the guards in the villages—the *pykes* and thanadars who enjoyed *chakaran* lands in the villages were now unequal to the task of guarding the countryside. The Supervisor of Rajshahi reported in 1771: "Numbers of ryots who have borne the first of characters among their neighbours pursue this last resource to procure themselves a subsistence". The Sannyasi and Fakir raiders who came from Tirhut, Morung, Coochbehar were joined by many such sturdy peasants. In Dinajpur Sannyasi raids became habitual. In Purnea hardly a day passed without some barefaced robbery. The old system was no longer operative. It was necessary to evolve a new system of policing the countryside. Hastings succeeded in checking these Sannyasi and Fakir raiders by sending detachments of troops to fight these armed bands of marauders. It took him several years. But the system proved to be a failure. "These strangers hearing of the Faujdari office and how useful and salutary it was in former times set up the like officers", in the first instance at Hughli, Katwa, Mirzanagar (Jessore) and Boosna. They were expected to suppress the banditti, high-waymen and thieves. But by 'exercising every art of oppression and injustice they rendered themselves odious and contemptible in every blind alley as also in every frequented market'<sup>17</sup>. This experiment was not a success. The evil of dacoity spread but this new police system was not extended.

Mir Jafar put the British in possession of the 24-Parganas in July 1757. For 16 months they collected the revenue themselves. But then on the advice of Holwell it was decided by the Calcutta Council to farm



the land revenue—'public auction in single parganas'. The idea was that this would lead to knowledge of the real value of the lands. The old zamindars and subordinate farmers under them were thus dispossessed. They protested and said that this was contrary to the customs of Hindustan. Holwell became a farmer of two of the best parganas. There were twelve Calcutta banians among the fourteen farmers of revenue. This farming experiment failed. Most of the farmers rackrented, absconded or became fraudulently bankrupt. With the old zamindars and old subordinate farmers dispossessed the 'black servants' in office, the clerks and accountants of the revenue department, found full scope for their manipulations during the period of direct administration and farming experiment. The zamindars of the 24-Parganas were, however, restored in 1772.

When Mir Qasim ceded Burdwan, Midnapur and Chittagong to the British he insisted on a provision—'they shall continue the zamindars and renters in their places'. But his administration ended in 1763 and even during the period 1760-1763 this injunction was not obeyed. Verelst, who was placed in charge of administration at Chittagong, did not employ amils. Clive and his select committee wanted to introduce farming in Midnapur. But in the peculiar circumstances of the district, with its large number of zamindars and talukdars, this was not found feasible. But in Burdwan though the Maharaja was not removed John Johnstone, an English official, styled "Resident", was in charge of the management of revenues. He introduced revenue farming by public auction. This has been described as 'the outcry' system. But in two years 1762-1763 there was an accumulated balance of Rs. 16,54,134. Many of the old subordinate farmers under the zamindar were ruined. The most profitable farms were held by the clerks and accountants of the revenue establishment and by the banians of the firm of Johnstone, Hay and Bolts. John Johnstone, the Resident, himself held farms at an underrate. But the old established subordinate farmers of revenue of the Burdwan district were ruined in their attempt to outbid new comers. The farms in the Burdwan district became the huting ground of *mutsuiddis* and banians. Yet the arrears in the third year amounted to more than 15 lakhs. Verelst who succeeded Johnstone as "Resident" abolished the 'outcry' system and decided to give lands in lots to 'men of substance and character'. Most of them were Calcutta banians. One of these new farmers was his own banian Gokul Ghosal. But even this substantial Calcutta banian defaulted after some time because the revenue demand was pitched very high. Thus during these years new groups of people became connected with land who had so far nothing to do with land-holding. The old governing principle—a standard revenue (*asal Jumma*)—disappeared in Burdwan and Chittagong. An exaggerated Jumma, consequential rackrent, impoverished zamindars, ruined old subordinate revenue farmers and a fraudulent group of new farmers of revenue appeared in these areas. The old indigenous system of land revenue



administration was thus subverted. The state of things in Diwani portion of Bengal between 1765-1772 has already been described. The one fixed point in Diwani administration was the *asal Jumma*. Everything else was variable and negotiable. The *asal Jumma* and the *patta* or the *nirik* or customary rent where there was no *patta*, were the twin pillars of the Mughal revenue system in its good old days. But the revenue demand being pitched very high the *patta*, wherever it existed, lost its importance. This process of decline, once begun, was hastened during subsequent years. The Famine of 1770 made its unreality more patent.

The Famine of 1770 was caused by an uncommon drought. There was a partial failure of December crop of 1768 and September crop of 1769. From the middle of August 1769 there was no rain till the beginning of January 1770 and then it lasted a few hours and came too late to be of general benefit. There was therefore a complete failure of the December crop of 1769. Thus came the great Famine which raged in all severity throughout 1770. Pestilence came in the wake of famine. The districts most affected by famine and pestilence were—Purnea, Nadia, Rajshahi, Birbhum, Pachet, northern and western parts of Burdwan, Bhagalpur, Rajmahal, Hughli, Jessore, Malda, and the Twenty-four Parganas. The western parts of Dinajpur, parts of Dacca, Midnapur and Rangpur were also affected. Bakargunge, Chittagong, Sylhet, Coochbehar and southern parts of the Dacca districts were not affected by the Famine. About ten millions of people must have perished in Bengal and Bihar. But the collection of revenue was not permitted to be affected. Assessment was made on the surviving ryots to make up for the loss by death or desertion. "Not even 5 per cent of the land revenue was remitted and ten per cent was added to it next year. The relief measures were inhumanly inadequate".

The administration was accused of dealing in grain for private advantage. The *gomastahs* of some of the Supervisors in surplus districts were accused of trying to corner the grain market. Even the Court of Directors thought that the monopolizing Europeans must be no other than persons of some rank in the service who were strong enough to prevent an enquiry into their proceedings. There were three years of extraordinary abundance after 1770. Lands therefore began to fall out of tillage even after the Famine. One third of the population was swept away. One third of the land returned to jungle. Hastings wrote in 1774, "My everlasting theme of the Famine I must continue to insist on as an event the effect of which must still be felt for many years and which renders it impossible that the collections should be equal to what they were formerly". Yet at the head of the Committee of Circuit, which he appointed in 1772 on the assumption of Diwani, he embarked on Five-Year farming on the basis of accumulating increase (*russad*). This must have been in the words of Hastings himself due to 'want of a principle of government adequate to the substance of responsibility'.

Becher, Resident at the *Durbar*, suggested in 1769 that lands might



be let out to farm for at least three years with an assurance that the farmers would be allowed to continue further if they behaved well. The Court of Directors had also suggested in 1768 that Burdwan should be farmed out on long leases. In 1769 a proposal was made that Nadia should be let out in farm for three years. Farming was very much discussed by top men. It was already established in some areas. Warren Hastings said about this decision regarding quinquennial farming: "All without exception enjoined it. I made it general and I lengthened the period of the leases which was before annual to five years". This was one of the principal recommendations of the Committee of Circuit over which he presided. Subordinate farming had been prevalent in many parts of Bengal. But these subordinate farmers under the zamindars were all local people. But the government giving out a district in farm to the highest bidder was not a Mughal tradition. This was the 'outcry' system which had failed so completely under John Johnstone as also in the Twenty-four Parganas under Holwell. This public auction was made on the basis of an accumulating increase—technically called *russud*. Zamindari system was superseded but in many places zamindars who succeeded in outbidding others were made farmers. All this led to over-assessment. But a prospect of gain induced many bidders to bid much higher than prudence would dictate. In Nadia, a district decimated by the Famine, the normal annual land revenue demand was about 8 lakhs. Five-year farming in 1772 was for Rs. 10,64,530 with an annual increase in the total demand. The bidders—most of them unknown people from Calcutta—defaulted in the payment of the first instalment. In 1773 the Raja of Nadia agreed to take the district on the terms of the sale. But it was too much to expect that this stricken district would yield so much. Rani Bhowani of Rajshahi succeeded in outbidding others but she defaulted and the district was given in farm to Dulal Roy and Amrit Singh. In Purnea, two very substantial Calcutta banians, Hazari Mal and Madan Dutta, became farmers of revenue. They agreed to a settlement for five years on the basis of accumulating increase. For the first year they promised to pay almost the same amount which had been realized before the Famine though half the population had died in 1770. But the farmers' agents failed and they had to relinquish the farm. Over-assessment was the most noticeable feature of the Five-Year Settlement, and at the end of five years remissions and balances amounted to two crores and twenty lakhs. The most profitable farms were, however, held by the Indian underlings of the Company's servants. But in many cases the beneficiaries were their European masters. Barwell derived very considerable profit from the salt farm of Dakhin Shabazpur as also from the salt farm of Hijli. Thackeray, Collector of Sylhet, was the farmer of Sylhet. He later confessed that 'the persons named in the Committee of Circuit's settlement never existed'. Lawrell, one of the member of the Committee of Circuit, was connected with him in this business. Nathaniel Bateman, Collector of Monghyr, was the farmer



of the parganas of Kharakpur and Monghyr in the name of his banian Monhar Mukherjee. In most cases the remissions were made to these banians of Europeans in the Company's service. But in many areas opulent farmers were reduced to ruin. Many of them had to make handsome presents to members of the Committee of Circuit. Raja Ramkrishna of Rajshahi, adopted son of Rani Bhowani, reported in 1775 that he had to pay Rs. 40,432 to Kantu Babu (Warren Hastings' banian), Rs. 47,000 to Santiram Sinha (Middleton's Diwan) and Rs. 34,000 to Bhowani Ram (Graham's Diwan): Middleton and Graham were members of the Committee of Circuit. It was very natural therefore that strong declarations were made in the House of Commons that the Five Year settlement was sold by the servants of the Company. A corrupt motive was at work but there was also a desire to find out how much the country could yield without taking the trouble of detailed investigation. The farming system was adopted as the act of a proprietor with a profit view of determining the value of the estate. The Court of Directors wrote in 1773, "It is with the utmost satisfaction we observe that the farming system will be generally adopted" and they should take a share of the blame that attached to this adventure in land revenue administration."

Many of the zamindars became farmers of revenue or under-renters under the farmers. The farmers were empowered to issue new *pattas* to the ryots. The zamindars were dispossessed and those zamindars who were transformed into farmers of revenue were granted *mushaira* or maintenance allowance,—zamindar of Nadia 2 lakhs, zamindar of Rajshahi 2½ lakhs, Dinajpur 2½ lakhs. The total sum paid to the dispossessed zamindars amounted to Rs. 21,28,666. New *pattas* were to be granted to the ryot by the farmers and in a new form. But *pattas* could not be given. Most of the farmers did not last long enough for any new system to become operative. Even if a farmer lasted for some time he could only meet his revenue obligations by rackrenting and there was no inclination to undertake the investigation necessary for granting new *pattas*. There could not be any register of *pattas* in these circumstances and new abuses crept into the system of collection of rent. The zamindars sank into sloth and became overwhelmed with debts. Many of the farmers falsified the records of the villages. When they found they could not continue any longer they gave to those of the ryots who were prepared to buy them written receipts for a lower rent than they paid. The farmers who succeeded, unless they were old local zamindars, were misled by the seeming authenticity of those documents. The idea of an original rent disappeared or in the words of Hastings became an object of mere historical curiosity. The ryots endeavoured by fraudulent means to extend the limits of their farm or to lessen the amount of rent. The more opulent ryots purchased an exemption from assessment by aiding the farmer and transferring the burden to the poorer ryots.



This principle of an original rent was not perhaps very much operative but the tradition was there. Even the tradition now completely disappeared. The farmers of revenue could not be made responsible for law and order. They could not possibly maintain a band of *thanadars* and *pykes* and pay compensation for robberies and at the same time meet their revenue obligations to government. Local responsibility for law and order could not be enforced in the changed circumstances. But the small faujdari establishment of Warren Hastings could not maintain peace and he was financially not in a position to cover Bengal and Bihar with faujdari establishments. His plan was only to cover the areas between Calcutta and Murshidabad.

The old system of civil justice was very simple. Muslim civil law relating to succession, inheritance, etc., was not extended to Hindus. Zamindars decided all petty cases in their cutchery and panchayats, 'a historically effective if somewhat shadowy' local organisation adjudicated civil disputes and even condemned offenders to reparations and fine'. In the rural areas of Bengal there was therefore justice at the door. Zamindari justice was very imperfect in its nature but it was speedy. There were no regular graded appellate courts. The Amils, we presume, also exercised indeterminate appellate civil jurisdiction. But during the troubled years 1757-72 the regular course of justice was everywhere suspended and every man exercised it, who had the power of compelling others to submit to his decisions.<sup>19</sup> A new system of revenue therefore led logically to the creation of a new system of justice. But Hastings exercised his authority to reorganize criminal justice also in the name of the Nawab. The Committee of Circuit drew up a plan. There were to be two courts in each district—one civil and the other criminal. In the district civil court the collector was to preside, assisted by his 'native' dewan, and cases were to be determined in open court. The farmers of revenue were allowed to exercise jurisdiction in petty cases not exceeding Rs. 10/-. In cases exceeding Rs. 500/- in value there could be an appeal to the Sadar Dewani Adalat in Calcutta. This Adalat consisted of the President (Governor) and members of the Council assisted by the native officers. In the district criminal courts the *Kazi* and the *Mufti* of the district sat with two Maulavis to expound the Mahammedan law. But the collector was to see to it that the proceedings were fair and the decision impartial. Appeals from these district nizamat adalats could be made to the Sadar Nizamat Adalat over which an officer appointed by the Nazim was to preside, assisted by the head Qazi and Mufti and three eminent moulavis. They were to revise the proceedings of the district courts and in capital cases to prepare the sentence for the warrant of the Nazim. The Governor and Council was to see to it that justice was done in the Sadar Nizamat Adalat in the same manner as the Collector did in the district nizamat adalat. The King's Dewan must be satisfied that justice so 'essential to the welfare and safety of the country was not perverted by partiality or tainted by corruption'.<sup>20</sup> It has been suggested that the Muslim system of criminal justice was so ineffec-



tive and venal and so much opposed to the sense of natural justice that Warren Hastings felt justified in taking criminal justice under British supervision and thus give justice a footing by hook or crook in Bengal.

In November 1773 the collectors were recalled and five Provincial Councils were set up for the collection of revenue. A Provincial Council was normally composed of five servants of the Company. Each had a chief and four senior servants of the Company assisted by a 'native' Dewan. At Calcutta there was to be Committee of Revenue consisting of two members of the Board and three senior servants assisted by the Roy Royan as Dewan. This Committee was to hold jurisdiction over the Calcutta parganas and adjacent districts and over lands of persons of credit normally resident in Calcutta. The Provincial Councils were to correspond with the Governor and Council in the Revenue department and the Dewans were to correspond with the Roy Royan. The headquarters of the Provincial Council were at Murshidabad, Burdwan, Dinajpur, Dacca and Patna. The Provincial Councils appointed Naibs or deputies to hold courts of Diwani Adalat in remote districts. A civil court was annexed to each of the provincial Councils and one of the members of the Council superintended in monthly rotation. In the case of Nadira Begam vs. Bahadur Beg it was asserted in the Supreme Court, on behalf of the Provincial Council of Revenue at Patna, that Provincial Courts of Revenue were acknowledged courts of judicature and they could refer cases under Muhammedan law to the *Qazis* and *Muftis*. The Superintendent could hear appeals from the Naibs' courts and take direct cognisance of cases arising in the seat of the Provincial Council but the whole council could also try a case if it was thought to be necessary. But the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court declared that a delegated authority could not be re-delegated, that law officers of the Provincial Councils of Revenue were subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court for actions taken as public officials. This conflict between executive and judicial authorities made it necessary for the Governor-General in Council to issue new regulations for the administration of justice. In 1780 the jurisdiction of the Provincial Councils of Revenue in all cases which had an immediate relation to public revenue was confirmed. But Courts of Civil judicature were established in Calcutta, Murshidabad, Burdwan, Dacca, Purnea and Patna and over each Court a servant of the Company was appointed as Superintendent of the Diwani Adalat. Their jurisdiction was separated from and made independent of the Provincial Councils. These Superintendents of the Diwani Adalat were all junior servants of the Company. About one of them Impey wrote that he was "of the meanest natural parts. I doubt whether he is of age".

The Sadar Diwani Adalat was discontinued shortly after the appointment of the Governor-General and Council and the Sadar Nizamat Adalat was transferred to Murshidabad where it began to function under the supervision of Md. Reza Khan who was re-appointed Naib Nazim in December, 1775 by the majority of the Council. He was also placed in



charge of faujdari *thanas* or police stations. He increased the number of *thanas* to twenty-six and *chokies* or subordinate stations to twenty-four. But the establishments remained very inadequate and the Provincial Councils were asked to supply sepoy to faujdars in emergency.

In September 1780 Hastings formulated a scheme for the revival of the Sadar Diwani Adalat. He wrote, "The Suddar Diwani Adalat has been commonly but erroneously understood to be simply a court of appeal. Its province is and necessarily must be more extensive. It is not only to receive appeals from the decrees of the inferior courts in all causes exceeding a certain amount but to receive and revise all the proceedings of the inferior courts, to attend to their conduct, to remedy their defects and generally to form such new regulations and checks as experience shall prove to be necessary".<sup>21</sup> The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was 'requested to accept of the charge and superintendency of Suddar Diwani Adalat'. The subordinate Diwani Courts would act 'under the sanction and patronage of the first member of the Supreme Court'. This was calculated to facilitate and give vigour to the course of justice. Impey accepted the offer. Hastings recommended that a salary of Rs. 5,000/- per month be attached to the post. Hastings expected by this measure to remove the abuses that prevailed in the country courts. But the whole arrangement could be viewed from a different angle. It could be regarded as inconsistent with the independence of Impey's position as Chief Justice. Even those who wrote in his defence were constrained to observe that this was 'wrong though not actually corrupt'. Impey was recalled by an order of the House of Commons in May, 1782 to answer a charge of accepting this office under the East India Company 'an office not agreeable to the true intent and meaning of Act 13, George III'. He was sought to be impeached for the part he played in the trial of Nandakumar and his acceptance of his Diwani Adalat appointment. Impey's impeachment was moved in 1787 but the majority of the members of the House of Commons did not vote in favour of it. This policy of Hastings of bringing about the amalgamation of the Supreme Court and the Sadar Adalat was justified eighty years after when the High Court Act in 1861 united the original and appellate jurisdictions.

The Five-year farming system, after it had involved the mofussil collections in laboured ambiguity, impoverished many speculating farmers, zamindar-farmers as also ryots in the settled areas of Bengal, was scrapped in 1777. Zamindari system was restored. Annual Settlements were made from 1777 to 1789. It was provided that 'revenue falling in balance he is to cause an adequate portion of his lands to be sold and the produce thereof to be paid to government'. In the case of a farmer "revenue falling in balance he is to make good the same by selling the substance and household effects together with those of his children and those of his relations who compose with him an undivided family". It was generally held that the revenue of every district was to be settled with the zamindars and they were to have the preference even if other persons were prepared to pay



considerably more. The medium of the net revenues received into the treasury in three preceding years became the standard for the *Jumma* of most of the zamindaris of Bengal. But it exceeded the ability of the zamindars in many parts. Thus the farming system perpetuated the tendency of government towards over-assessment. This policy of maximisation of land-revenue may be regarded as one of the many forms of extraction of wealth. As it was said "the private fortunes of moneyed men have been sunk in keeping up strained settlements and making good deficiencies till at length the sources of wealth are all dried up". Remission of rent was at this stage not less necessary than in the years 1771 and 1772 after the Famine. This would have ensured better zamindar-tenant relationship by checking the progressive rise of rent, a consequence of overassessment.

The Provincial Councils of Revenue were abolished in 1781 and the collectors returned to the districts. A Committee of Revenue was set up in Calcutta. It consisted of five experienced servants of the Company. It worked under the supervision of the Governor-General in Council. The principles of land revenue settlement continued to be the same. Though the zamindari system was restored landholding was henceforth governed not so much by usage as by contract. But on account of over-assessment a sale of all the lands of a zamindar was inadequate to discharge a balance of even half of the annual *Jumma*. But though the settlement was annual the zamindars were in most cases assured that if they conducted themselves to the satisfaction of the government they would be allowed to continue. Even where the hereditary landholder was disqualified by his pecuniary embarrassment by minority or by incapacity he was preserved the nominal distinction of lessee, the actual management being placed in other hands. The zamindars were generally in charge of the collection of rent and they tried to meet their revenue commitments as best as they could. This was the state of things in 1786 when Cornwallis arrived.

The Diwani judicial system was sought to be improved in 1781 by the creation of new mofussil courts. The Governor-General in Council increased the number of courts to eighteen—Midnapur, Patna, Darbhanga, Tajpur (instead of Dinajpur), Nator (Rajshahi), Dacca, Bakargunge, Murli (Jessore), Calcutta, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Azmeriganj (Sylhet), Bhagalpur, Chitra (Ramgarh), Chittagong, Lauriya (Champaran), Raghunathpur (Birbhum) and Rangpur. In Bhagalpur, Chitra, Islamabad and Rangpur the collector was to act also as judge, because there were some administrative and judicial problems peculiar to these frontier districts. Elsewhere covenanted servants who were designated as judges and not as superintendents decided civil cases. Judicial proceedings from these district courts were submitted to the Sadar Diwani Adalat. Impey, as Superintendent of Sadar Diwani Adalat, framed some regulations for the conduct of judicial business in the Diwani judicial courts.

When the Supreme Court began to function in Calcutta there were disputes between the British judiciary and the executive. The Regulating



Act vested in the Governor General and Council "the whole civil and military Government of the Presidency and the ordering and management of the territorial acquisitions and revenues of the kingdoms of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa". The Supreme Court was also vested with "full power and authority to hear and determine all complaints against any of His Majesty's subjects for any crimes or misdemeanours or oppressions committed or to be committed" and to hear and determine any suit or action against any of His Majesty's subjects. . . . and any suit or cause of action or complaint against any person employed by or directly or indirectly in the service of the Company or any of His Majesty's subjects".

It was known to everybody that the collection of revenue led to acts of oppression. Therefore the 'management' of territorial revenues vested in the council brought the officers of government under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. The Act did not make it clear whether they were exempt. Two important cases—the Patna case and the Kasijura case brought the dispute to the culminating point. In Patna Shahbaz Beg, an Afghan adventurer, died leaving a considerable fortune. His nephew Bahadur Beg claiming to be the adopted son disputed the succession with his widow Nadira Begam. Bahadur Beg took the dispute to the Provincial Council of Patna who referred the matter to their *Qazi* and *Muftis*. They reported that one fourth of the property should go to Nadira Begam and three-fourths to Bahadur Beg. The Provincial Council accepted the Report. The widow declined to accept her share. She is said to have refused to yield up the property which she had carried with her. She was placed under restraint. She brought a suit against Bahadur Beg, the *Qazi* and the *Muftis* in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court held the *Qazi* and *Muftis*, law officers of the Provincial Council, liable to a charge of assault and false imprisonment along with Bahadur Beg for their actions as public officials. They further declared that the Provincial Council had no right to delegate its authority to the *Qazi* and *Muftis*. Bahadur Beg and the *Muftis* were thrown into prison in Calcutta, the *Qazi* dying on the way. Bahadur Beg was declared subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court as a farmer of revenues. In the Kasijura case, Kasinath Babu of Calcutta, who had lent money to the zamindar of Kasijura filed a case against him in the Supreme Court on the plea that the Raja was employed by the Company in the collection of revenues. The Governor-General in Council asked him not to submit to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. The zamindar drove away the Sheriff who had come with the Supreme Court's writ. The Supreme Court then sent about sixty or seventy persons with the Sheriff to seize the zamindar of Kasijura. They got hold of him but on their way back to Calcutta they were met by troops from Midnapur who were asked by the Governor-General and Council to release the captive and they surrounded the Sheriff and his men and released the zamindar of Kasijura. Kasinath Babu then brought an action for trespass



against members of the Supreme Council individually. The Supreme Court's interpretation of its task of dealing with oppression in the executive government thus produced a harvest of evils in the opinion of the executive. The points at issue were finally settled by an Act of Parliament passed in 1781. The Supreme Court was to have no jurisdiction in matters concerning the revenue or acts according to the practice of the country and no person employed by the Company or any of its servants was to be considered subject to the jurisdiction of the court in matters of succession, inheritance or contract. Persons exercising judicial authority in the Adalats and persons acting under them were not to be amenable to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court for their official acts. Even in Calcutta where everybody was subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, in matters of succession, inheritance and contract the hindus were to be governed by the laws and usages of the hindus, the muslims by the laws and usages of the muslims and in cases between hindus and muslims by the laws and usages of the defendants. The country courts were recognised and the Governor-General and Council was empowered to frame regulations for the courts. Though Mughal sovereignty disappeared completely by 1790 the distinction between the Supreme Court and Adalats was to continue till 1861.

For the Diwani Civil Courts a code of Hindu law was compiled and translated into English and a translation of the *Hedaya* or code of muslim law was also made ready for use. The necessity of administering civil justice according to the law of the land was duly recognised. After the recall of Impey in 1782 the Governor-General and Council began to function as the Court of Sadar Diwani Adalat. In 1786 the Court of Directors wrote that it would tend more 'to simplicity, energy, justice and economy to reinvest the collectors with the superintendence of the courts of diwany Adalat'. In accordance with this order the office of Judge and Magistrate was combined with the Collector, the city courts of Dacca, Murshidabad and Patna being excepted. The decrees of Mufassil Diwani Adalats were to be final in cases upto Rs. 1,000/- . . . . but an appeal could be made to Sadar Diwani Adalat in cases exceeding that amount in value. For a case above Rs. 50,000 an appeal could be made to the King in Council in England. Though revenue and judicial functions were united, revenue and civil suits remained separate and the Board of Revenue constituted in 1786 heard appeals in revenue cases from the decisions of Collectors.

#### TOWARDS PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

In 1775 after three years of quinquennial farming Hastings and Barwell put forward proposals for the land revenue settlement of Bengal—farming out on leases for life or for two joint lives to 'such reasonable people as shall offer the most advantageous terms allowing a preference for zamindars'. They wrote, "the principal argument in favour of the



zamindars is the security arising from the power of selling their lands when landed property is put upon such a footing as to become desirable". In 1776 Philip Francis put forward his rival plan. He argued that "the whole demand should be founded on an estimate of the permanent services with a reasonable reserve for contingencies". He wanted the estimate to be liberal and he wanted that on this basis the contributions of the districts should be fixed for ever. According to him this distribution should be called *Tumar Jumma* in the style of Todar Mal. This would carry the idea of security. This fixed settlement should be made with the zamindars who were regarded by him as 'proprietors of the soil'. In regard to the ryots Francis argued that government could not descend to the ryots. He argued that if the zamindars and ryots were left to themselves they would come to an agreement, in which each party would find his advantage. He was inclined to attach great importance to the *patta* which he regarded as a voluntary agreement between landlord and tenant. Hastings was in favour of a long term settlement with the zamindars. He was in favour of a moderate assessment. He wrote to North in 1777<sup>22</sup>, "A body of merchants had interests to provide for besides which belonged to them in their assumed character as sovereign. Profit being the object of a trading company became the sole object of government when the two characters were united." Pitt's India Act expressed a resolve to establish 'permanent rules for the settlement and collection of the revenue and for the administration of justice'. In 1786 Cornwallis who proceeded to India as Governor-General was furnished with very significant instructions. Settlement should be made in all practicable instances with the zamindar, the average of former years' collection was to be the guide. The amount, when determined and approved by them, was to be considered the permanent and unalterable revenue of Bengal. For special reasons they desired that the settlement might be made for ten years certain with a notification that if approved by the Court of Directors it would become permanent and no further alteration take place at the expiration of ten years. In the Governor-General's Council Shore moved that the second part of the resolution be omitted. But Cornwallis insisted upon it and it was carried.

Shore was of opinion that so far as the amount of zamindari assessment was concerned it was sufficiently ascertained. He did not agree with James Grant that Bengal was under-assessed. But he was very emphatic on one point that it was necessary to introduce the new principle by degrees because there was so much confusion in matters of land-revenue. According to James Grant the original gross produce of Bengal amounted to twenty crores of rupees<sup>23</sup>. Shore argued that he assumed as a fact that the ryots of Bengal paid one half of the gross produce of their lands. If the government collected two crores of rupees and if the charges of zamindari collection be estimated at 15 p.c. and the intermediate profits 35 p.c. the rent would amount to three crores. If this was one half of the gross produce the total would be six crores. Even if the rents of alienated lands



were taken into consideration upon an exaggerated estimate the total would not very much exceed eight crores. In Midnapur where resumption proceedings were held the *Jumma* reannexed to the public assessment amounted to Rs. 1,00,474 and charity lands could not be resumed. If the sovereign's proprietary share in the words of Grant amounted to one fourth of the gross produce the government should not collect more than two crores of rupees<sup>24</sup>. The Decennial Settlement's assessment figures amounted to two crores seventeen lakhs.

But Shore was very much conscious that great abuses prevailed in the detail of the collections in Bengal and so far as waste lands were concerned he was sure the zamindars would not be deterred by a ten years' assessment from attempting to bring waste lands into cultivation. In view of the prevailing confusion if the existing state of things became suddenly unalterable, this confusion would never be put in order. A system consistent in all its parts would take some time to grow. He wrote, "Nor am I ashamed to distrust my own knowledge since I have frequent proofs that new enquiries lead to new information". The revenue proper could not be prodigiously increased. He even thought that the amount would sustain some diminution but the basis of this revenue demand was gross calculations and averages. It should be regulated by a real knowledge of the sources. It was further necessary to simplify the complicated rentals of the ryots, to define and establish the rights of the ryots and talukdars with precision together with the expediency of procuring clear data for the transfer by sale of public and private property. He argued, 'under all these circumstances is it not better to introduce a new principle by degrees than establish it at once beyond the power of revocation' (Shore's Minute 21st December, 1789).

Cornwallis counter-argued that the plan only gave some advantages to the zamindars and security to the Company against balances. He emphasised that the word permanence attached to the *Jumma* only and he hoped that Calcutta banians with their business like habits would displace the old type landlords. He was confident that new regulations would ensure the security of the ryots and *mazkuri* talukdars but at a later period. The landlords would be granting *pattas* to the ryots and at a later stage the government would intervene to adjust the relations between the landlords and tenants. But in order to simplify the demands of the landlords upon the ryots the government should fix the demand of the government upon the zamindar. The perpetuation of zamindari assessment would diffuse a spirit of improvement which would provide a remedy for many ills. He argued that this was not blind precipitation because twenty years were employed in collecting information and the government would never be better qualified at any given period to make an equitable settlement of the land revenue of their provinces. He concluded his argument by saying "until the assessment on the lands is fixed the constitution of the internal government in this country will never take the form which alone can lead



to the establishment of good laws and ensure a due administration of them."<sup>25</sup>

The Board of Control under Dundas was guided by considerations of expediency. Dundas wrote, "However amusing many of the researches may be as information for an antiquarian they are not entirely applicable to a sound determination of the controversy. It is not a matter of great moment what the precise form or principle of collecting the revenues was under the Mughal government. It is of more moment to ascertain what is the best mode of arranging the landholdings of distant provinces"<sup>26</sup>. Mill appears to be justified in his opinion of Henry Dundas, "I know not of any advice which he ever gave for the government of India that was not either very obvious or wrong"<sup>27</sup>. The Court of Directors was also of the same opinion as the Governor-General and the Board of Control. They also felt that it would be vain to attempt to place things upon the same footing in which they stood at a distant period. The assessment was sufficient for the usual exigencies of government with the reserve proper for extraordinary services. They turned down Shore's proposal of making gradual advance to perpetual settlement and they stuck to the original idea of giving a fixed constitution to the finance and land tenure of the country. They wrote, "Lord Cornwallis's argument, a permanent assessment upon the scale of the present ability of the country, must contain in its nature a productive principle ; the possession of property and the sure enjoyment of its benefits will awaken and stimulate industry, promote agriculture and extend improvement, establish credit and augment the general wealth and property". They were emphatic in their view that "In order to simplify and regulate the demands of the landholders upon the tenants the first step is to fix the demand of government itself . . . . alternative sitting down passive under the supposed existing difficulties . . . . We therefore direct you to declare wherever it has been made with or on behalf of landholders perpetual but leave no ambiguity as to our right to interfere from time to time as may be necessary for the protection of the ryot and subordinate land-holders"<sup>28</sup>.

### *The Cornwallis System :*

Cornwallis had some very definite views. He argued that the due enforcement of the regulations for obliging the zamindars to grant *pattas* to their ryots would remove the most important objection to a Permanent Settlement. The *Pattas* would be the rules by which the rents would be collected from the ryots. As agriculture was the principal source of the riches of Bengal it was necessary to make the assessment upon the lands as little burdensome as possible. Therefore assessment was to be fixed. Zamindari *chokis* on the banks of the rivers were to be abolished with adequate deduction granted to the zamindars. The collection of internal dues on commerce was to be reserved for future government use. The government would thereby be able to appropriate to itself a share of the growing



wealth of its subjects. In this way the weight of the state demand would be more equally distributed. The constitution of the internal government of the country would thus have a fixed character and the attention of the government would be devoted to the establishment of good laws and their due administration. This was to be the Cornwallis system. It was to mark the transition from 'unregulated imperialism' to 'regulated imperialism'.

Cornwallis argued that England was fortunate enough to establish dominion over one of the richest regions of the earth. The inhabitants were mild and industrious. England now depended upon it for a large annual investment, for supply of bullion to the treasury at Canton and for supporting the other two Presidencies of Madras and Bombay. The remittance of private fortune added considerably to this drain and helped to bring about further impoverishment. There was 'a general langour thrown upon the cultivation and commerce of the country'. It was therefore necessary to have a material alteration in the principles of British system of administration. This country should be restored to prosperity if it was to be a source of solid support to British interests and power. The advantageous tenure would induce the zamindars to make exertions. "The landed property would fall into the hands of the most thrifty class of people. . . . it was immaterial to government what individual possesses the land provided he cultivates it, protects the ryot and pays the public revenue"<sup>29</sup>. The permanent settlement was announced by proclamation on 22nd March, 1793 and zamindars were notified. Within six short weeks, a series of regulations were passed the whole constituting a comprehensive code for the fiscal and judicial administration of Bengal.

The Government demand of land-revenue was 9/10 of the rent. In the year 1793 the amount demanded could not be regarded as a moderate *jumma*. The country was rated fully as high as it could bear. Remote little known districts were not assessed as much as they could yield. But in the settled areas the demand was as high as it could be. The zamindar of Rajshahi and the zamindar of Burdwan were very unwilling to agree to accept this severe assessment. But they had no other alternative. Urgency and rigidity were new features and they changed the character of agrarian relations. Zamindars or their agents were sent to prison in large numbers for defaulting in the payment of land-revenue. After 1794 there was no coercion but land could be brought to sale at any time in the course of the year if the zamindar failed to pay an instalment. The zamindars naturally demanded that they should have some such authority for the realization of their rent as was used by the government for the realization of revenue. The ryots were habitually irregular in their payment. It was therefore suggested that the zamindars should be given the right to distrain and sell the personal chattels of the tenants for the recovery of arrears of rent. Overassessment and demand for punctual payment necessitated such measures. Increase of population, disappearance of domestic manufactures, increasing pressure on land brought to land-



holders in the nineteenth century very considerable unearned increment. But in the closing years of the eighteenth century things were very difficult for the landlords. So the government stepped in. Regulation XVII (Sec. II) of 1793 authorized zamindars and talukdars "to distrain for arrears without sending any notice to a court of justice the tenants' crops of every description, the grain, cattle and all the personal property". Sec. IV "the ploughs and implements of husbandry, the cattle immediately trained to the plough and the seed grain shall not be distrained for arrears". Sec. XVI "The distraint shall not be excessive". Persons who might deem themselves injured by the distraint were to seek redress in the Diwani Adalat. But the real contest for some time was between the zamindar and the underfarmers who could take advantage of this provision and protract the realization of dues. So the provision by which distrainers were to withdraw the attachment in case the person gave security to have the fairness of the demand tried in a court of law was annulled. Reg. VII of 1799 gave wide powers of distraint against the ryots though the defaulters were mostly underfarmers. It gave a blank cheque to the zamindar. The ryots were adjudged defaulters if the arrears were not paid on the *kist* day. There was to be no notice of 15 days. Property could be brought to sale within six days after attachment. Palliatives were sought to be provided by Reg. V of 1812. It modified the working of the system of distraint but it did not change for the better the circumstances which led to the distraint. There could not be any equality between the zamindar and tenant before the court of law. The wolf and the lamb were left to fight out the quarrel. As it was pointed out by a district judge and magistrate in 1814 "the laws which protect the ryot appear likely to prevent oppression on the part of the landlord, yet not a day passes without every one of the rules being broken. If the tenant institutes a suit it is referred to the native head commissioner. He decides according to law and the landholder appeals to the judge. The cause lies over for three years and when it is eventually decided against him he files a special appeal to the Provincial Court. A rule for staying judgment is issued and the suit remains undecided perhaps two or three years more. The unfortunate ryot is in the meantime ruined . . . *Summum juris Summa injuria*".<sup>30</sup> All existing customary rights of the ryots were annulled. It was as if the past was over and done with so far as landlord-tenant relationship was concerned. The situation was best summed up by Ram Mohan Ray when he was asked this question—"In the event of the tenants falling into arrears with their rent what means do the proprietors adopt for realising it? A—they distrain their movable property with some exceptions by the assistance of police officers and get it sold by means of judicial authorities". No one denies the good intentions of the government, the boon of independent courts, but the procedure was so costly, so intricate and so dilatory that it defeated the ends of justice. Moreover the Permanent Settlement, as originally interpreted, imposed a *laissez faire* style of administration upon Bengal.



The problem of landlord-tenant relationship was the adjustment of rents on definite terms. Cornwallis was under the impression that "the landholders will without difficulty be made to grant *pattas* to the ryots". The authors of the Permanent Settlement appear to have been conscious of the 'necessity of securing to the tenants the same certainty as to the amount of their rents and the same undisputed enjoyment of the fruits of their industry which we mean to give to the zamindars themselves'. Hunter writes that this could not be done because of 'the flood of new business, land litigation, land sales, conflicting rights and claims, a new system of civil and criminal courts, a new system of magisterial jurisdiction and police'. He takes care to distinguish between imperfections in form and fundamental errors that vitiated the settlement. The areas of zamindars' estates were not known. The areas of *nankar* lands, *chakaran* lands, and *lakhiraj* lands were not clearly demarcated. The limits of the villages were not determined as also the limits of waste lands and pasture lands. There was endless confusion which led to endless litigation. The qanungo record of rights had suffered because of three decades of neglect and after the Permanent Settlement when the qanungos were no longer in employ their records disappeared. In the midst of all this the pious wish of granting *pattas* to the ryots could not very naturally be given effect to. It was notified in November 1791 that landholders and renters in Bengal would be allowed till the end of 1792 to prepare and deliver *pattas* to the ryots. But the collectors from different districts reported about July 1792 that there was no inclination on the part of the ryots to receive *pattas* because of various reasons. The regulations concerning the granting of *pattas* were almost universally disregarded. As Field points out in his *Introduction to Bengal Regulations* there was a general dislike of written law in Bengal. The zamindar disliked it because it would create a new *asal* and lead to other cesses. The tenant felt generally everywhere that a *patta* for a term would diminish the force of his prescriptive rights. They could never feel that the government would give them protection. They were more inclined to rely upon the rates prevalent in their respective villages.

The ancient privileges of the ryots, their claim to continuity on the basis of a reasonable and established payment guarded by custom, had disappeared. If written agreements were to be given for the annual possession of the lands the assessments they were to specify were to be formed on calculations the most intricate and such as no arithmetic could explain. The situation which was created is best explained in the words of Colebrooke—"Measurements long omitted, without a rule by record substituted in their place and former surveys forgotten or their rates become obsolete, leaves no certain rule for adjusting the rents. It is endeavoured to obtain from the tenant an undertaking for the current year but having to dispute arbitrary imposts he seldom consents. The landlord estimates the amount of his wants, distributes it at pleasure on his tenants and endeavours to levy this assessment. In the confusion of disputed demands





no documents pass". No progress could be made in the adjustment of rents on definite terms. The *patta* regulation became a dead letter.

It has been said that the rights of the Bengal ryots passed away sub-silentio and they became to all intents and purposes tenants-at-will. But the tenacity of old impressions kept alive the idea of a right in the mind of the ryots that he could hold this land at a rent fixed by custom. The landlords themselves were not altogether exempt from this traditionary feeling. The evil of additional levies made by the zamindars was well-known. The ryots' rent was composed of *asal*, *abwab*, *mathot* or occasional imports and *kharcha* or contributions for expenses on various accounts. There might even be an additional item—*andazee beshee* or estimated increase in some places described as '*ogayaraha*' etcetera. All these were fluctuating demands. But this is only one side of the picture. In many parts of Bengal the ryots had more land than was included in their agreements. They thus held land at an underrated value. The intricacy and confusion of accounts appeared to be insoluble and the government gave up all attempts to solve this problem. There were some privileged tenants—the *mandals*—who were in many parts of Bengal in league with the local zamindari *amla* or officer. The zamindari officers were not liked by the lower ryots and this *amla*-ryot relationship became one of the worst features of rural life.

Enhancement finds no mention in the Cornwallis Code of 1793. The proprietors were to pay the same fixed land revenue to the government. The tenants were to pay the same rates of rent for ever to the proprietors so far as this could be inferred from the spirit of the provisions. But rapid increase of population, rapid disappearance of domestic industries, the relentless economic law of demand and supply, the growing *laissez faire* attitude of the government, made the settlement permanent only to the middle men 'fluctuating beyond even Irish fluctuation to the cultivator'.<sup>34</sup> Competitive rent had practically no existence before 1793. Land was not a means of investing capital. There was no such pressure of population as might prove an incentive to cultivate the waste land. This state of things changed very rapidly about this time and all tillage rights whether of property or of occupancy disappeared. The Permanent Settlement got stuck halfway. The old patriarchal system was sought to be replaced by a cold regulation system. Cornwallis felt reassured that the injured would fly to the courts of justice. The rigour of the sale law brought about a social revolution. Before 1794 the zamindar could be arrested and his goods and estates might be attached and he might be put in confinement. A *Sezawal* or *Wadadar* might be deputed to collect the rent. But the ryots were always in favour of old zamindars. A *Sezawal* or *Wadadar* would not be able to carry on for a long time. The zamindar would return to his estate sooner or later. A prolonged imprisonment was regarded as a scandal. Direct management invariably failed. But it was now declared "the Governor-General in Council considered their property



alone a sufficient security for the public dues". This was apparently a mild, humane procedure. But its consequences were disastrous. Many of the zamindars were unable to adjust themselves to this change. With their easy going happy-go-lucky character they could not overnight become punctual tax gatherers. Westland has shown in his history of Jessore that of all the principal zamindaris of Jessore only two could withstand the ordeal of the first few years. The break up of the Nator zamindari gives a very good idea of the effects of this legislation on the zamindars. Within twenty-two years from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the whole landed property of Bengal was actually sold on this account".

The Raja of Burdwan divided his zamindari into lots called *patnis* of a greater or lesser value and sold them with his rights as a zamindar to anybody who would buy on condition that the land-revenue of this portion would be paid to him. If he failed the lot could be resold to any other purchaser. These *Patnidars* could also alienate their right to the whole or part of the lots to another who would be answerable in the same manner. This process went on. There were *patnidars*, *dur patnidars*, *dur-dur-patnidars* and so on. The *Patni* system with its ramifications thus multiplied undertenures. Intricacy of accounts, fraudulent concealments became very widespread. The Permanent Settlement had prohibited the zamindars from giving any lease longer than twelve years. The twelve years restriction was abolished in 1812. Subinfeudation could now be carried to the furthest extreme. The older zamindars became in many cases mere annuitants. The old spirit of mutual dependence between landlords and tenants began to disappear but not immediately. The new system of administration proving to be inadequate the zamindars or their representatives still continued to exercise judicial functions—petty justice—in their own way. In many areas the new comers, variously described as *lotdars* or *nilamdars*, became anxious to establish their aristocracy by means of family ties with the old aristocracy, now impoverished. Many of these new landlords—bigger, middle ranking as also smaller—zamindars as also *talukdars*, *patnidars* and *durpatnidars*—were not without some of the old active kindness. But we notice one uniform departure from old practice. The zamindars were accustomed according to Mughal traditions to grant *takavi* loans to their tenants. But the pressure of new revenue demand made it almost impossible for them to grant *takavi* loans. The rural money lenders' (*Mahajan*) gradual appearance in the country side strikes an observer in the early years of the nineteenth century. The *Mahajan* entrenched himself in rural economy which came to be dominated by him. By the middle of the nineteenth century he became almost as important as the landlord. The agrarian set up in 1793 is best described in the words of Ilbert—"A revenue payers we found the zamindar, a rent receiver we made him—not a landlord in the English sense whose rent represents interest on capital which has been expended on farm buildings, drainage and the like . . . . the legislation of 1793 left the ryot's right outstanding and undefined



and by so leaving them it tended to obscure them, to efface them and in many cases to destroy them".<sup>56</sup>

## EXPORT TRADE : FROM COMPETITION TO MONOPOLY (1757-1793).

The English East India Company's trade with Europe—officially described as 'Investment'—amounted on an average to about 33 lakhs a year. Private trade of the Company's servants cannot be accurately estimated. This was coasting and inter-Asian trade. The Company's servants were not Company's rivals before Plassey. But they fraudulently carried on their trade 'free from any Moor's duties in the passage'. The Dutch, the French and the Danes were also doing brisk business before Plassey. Dutch trade from Bengal with Europe and other parts of Asia was so thriving that they found it necessary to construct a magnificent building at Cossimbazar in 1739 which cost them Rs. 1,53,000. They had left Dacca in 1690 but in 1753 they again established themselves there. The Dutch did not earn any respect in Bengal as a military power. Opium and saltpetre were their leading articles of trade but they were gradually taking to trade in silk and cotton. In 1755 they collected about 27,000 bags of saltpetre, 2 mds. each. There was British predominance in trade in cotton piecegoods, silk goods and raw silk. The Dutch could keep their lead in the export of opium to Ceylon, the Malacca straits and the Malaya archipelago. The French and the English together did not export half the quantity of opium which the Dutch exported. In 1756 the Dutch could export 57,000 pieces of cotton piecegoods. Their exports of silk piecegoods in 1753 amounted to a lakh of rupees. There was a dwindling volume of British coastal trade with the west coast but there was an increase in overland trade and an increasing number of country purchasers. Mirzapore became the centre for the supply of cotton for Bengal's looms from central India and upper India. There was competition in the best sense of the term between the European companies because the Nawab's government knew very well how to keep them under control in their competition for Bengal's goods. British abuse of their trade privileges was, however, a great irritant.

With Plassey began a large-scale British invasion of Bengal's inland trade. The servants of the Company began immediately to trade in salt, betelnut and tobacco, three articles of inland trade which were so long prohibited to all Europeans. They also began a brisk traffic in *dastaks*. The abuses grew with the consciousness of untrammelled power. They grew from year to year and by the time Mir Qasim came to power in 1760 this privileged private trade in the three most important articles of inland trade and in many others of lesser importance became a menace to the economic set up of the province and the trade of the country traders. The *gomastahs* of the Company's servants invaded every market and village



and carried on trade in oil, fish, straw, bamboo, rice, paddy, betelnut, etc. British Free Merchants, who were settled in some parts of the province, secured the use of *dastaks* from the servants of the Company who were eager to sell them to anybody who was willing to purchase this privilege. Some country merchants, who were prepared to pay the price, also bought the privilege. As Mir Qasim wrote, "They expose my government to scorn and are of the greatest detriment to me. Every man with a Company's *dastak* in his hand regards himself as not less than the Company". But he tried to come to an understanding with the Governor and Council and declared himself ready to give his government's *dastak* to the English Company's servants for their private trade on payment of 9 p.c. of prime cost where the goods could be procured. The native merchants paid 25 p.c. independent of stoppages. The Calcutta Council would not agree and only as a concession to the Nawab agreed to pay him 2½ p.c. on salt as an indulgence. The Nawab in disgust declared inland trade of Bengal duty free for two years. But the Calcutta Council was not prepared to forego "this right to that plentiful source of gain in which they had hitherto participated only by usurpation"<sup>37</sup>. They regarded it as 'a breach of peace towards the English nation'. There was rupture with the Nawab. Mir Qasim was dethroned. The situation is best explained in the words of a document on Taxes on English Commerce in Bengal<sup>38</sup>. "The servants of the Company usurped the more destructive and more profitable right of regulating trade of Bengal. The extension of privileges and exemptions usurped by the servants of the English virtually constituted sovereignty. They violated the sources of revenue and other rights of the sovereign at will. The servants' *banians* and *gomastahs* varied the internal taxes and superseded the civil and criminal jurisdiction of the country". An exemption from duties thus threw the whole trade into the hands of the English. In June 1764 the Court of Directors instructed the Governor and his Council 'after consulting the Nawab to form a proper and equitable plan for carrying on the inland trade'. But the new course of inland trade remained undisturbed until August 1765 though Clive arrived in Calcutta in May 1765. The Directors' disapproval of the state of things was conveyed in their letter dated 26th April, 1765: "We do not think that such a construction was ever heard of until our own servants first invested and afterwards supported it by violence..... The specious arguments used by those who pretended to set up a right to it convince us they did not want judgement but virtue to withstand the temptation of suddenly amassing a great fortune, altogether incompatible with the peace of the country and their duty to the Company". The plan of a regulated inland trade for the servants of the Company was now formulated by the Select Committee on 10th August, 1765. In the meantime the royal grant of Diwani was secured also in August, 1765. The Company now became 'the Lords of the Country' and the revenues flowed into their treasury. It is relevant to note that the duties arising from the *Pachotrah* office at Murshidabad only a few years before amounted to Rs. 3,84,000 and it was





almost nominal now.<sup>39</sup> Taking all these things into consideration Clive and the Select Committee decided to establish a private trade society. A monopoly was formed of the trade in salt, betelnut and tobacco to be carried on exclusively for the benefit of the superior servants of the Company numbering about sixty. Purchases were to be made by contract. Goods were to be conveyed by the agents of the Society to certain places where they were sold to native merchants and retailers at established prices. In the second year of this monopoly trade it was provided that salt should be sold at Calcutta and other places of importance. The Company was to be paid a duty of 35 p.c. upon salt, 10 p.c. on betelnut and 25 p.c. on tobacco. "A duty amounting to one hundred and twenty thousand pounds was established for the Company which was increased the following year to one hundred sixty thousand pounds"<sup>40</sup>. "The black merchants were given the sole right of vending it throughout the country. But the Court of Directors declared in their letter of 17th May, 1766 that the inland trade society was a violation of their repeated orders. This trade must be abandoned. It was 'disgraceful' to allow of such a monopoly. As it was a peremptory order their servants had to comply with it. But it was argued that contracts had been formed and advances made. The Society was not therefore abolished finally till 14th September, 1768. As a compensation the Court ordered distribution of 2½ per cent on the revenues among the servants of the East India Company. But, as Verelst pointed out, "orders of distant masters were but a feeble barrier against the united interest of every man in the settlement". The Directors wrote "you take the most effective methods to prevent those great necessities of life from being monopolised by the rich and great among themselves (the natives)". But the Europeans now engaged in trade in salt under the names of their 'black agents' and the profits of this commerce were added to this commission from land revenue collection.

The Company's servants acted as agents for the Company's Investment which amounted to about six million current rupees in 1767. It was ten million in 1777, the two principal articles being cotton piecegoods and raw silk. These two commodities formed nine tenths of the investment. In 1774 the Court of Directors established a Board of Trade with eleven senior servants of Company. They were each given a handsome salary—the President £2,000 and members £1,500 a year. But they were also permitted to carry on legal private trade. The Board was entirely to have under them the executive part of the business. The agency system disappeared and the Company's servants now became contractors for investment under the Board of Trade. The price of investment goods was fraudulently advanced. Prices increased and quality deteriorated. This was particularly true of raw silk. The practice in the mofussil was to reject raw silk as unfit for the Company's assortments and then purchase them in private trade. The Company was therefore compelled to send experts to superintend the manufacturing of raw silk and develop the filature system and thus eliminate collusive contracts and encroachment of



private trade as also improve the quality of raw silk. Raw silk in private trade paid the Company's servants very good dividend. Silk exported was part Bengal wound and part filature. During the War of American Independence the Company was not in a position to invest more than 15 lakhs in raw silk. So this trade on private account thrived. The Company very soon resumed this trade with the revival of prospects of raw silk investment. Cornwallis' policy of putting bounds to seductions of private interest proved to be effective. He established paid agency system for investment as a compensation.

There were 'shoals of British Free Merchants' in the words of Verelst—at least eight of them in Dacca. These Free Merchants were allowed by the Company to carry on trade in Bengal 'in the way of a merchant in India', more or less on the footing of the Armenians. Fifty tons were allowed as privilege to the commanders and officers of each of the Company's ships of 755 tons and upwards. This was private trade of the Company's servants or of the British Free Merchants. There was competition between them and the servants of the Company for the provision of this 'privilege' trade on British ships and for the provision of goods for foreign ships in the cotton weaving centres. In some cases the Free Merchants took the help of the Company's servants in procuring their cotton piecegoods in return for a premium. In this manner they sought to exclude Bengali and Armenian merchants from this field of business. Danish trade from Serampore—Danish private traders and the Danish Company—depended very much upon these Free Merchants. "In the 1770's and 1780's, Copenhagen, Ostend and Lisbon became the centres of an India trade which was for the most part British in all but name".<sup>41</sup> Ole Bie, Danish Chief at Serampore, was the central figure in this 'clandestine' trade—'private British trading ventures under the Danish flag'.

The illicit trader was no doubt a nuisance but the Court of Directors was very much worried by the competition of the Dutch East India Company, the French East India Company and French private traders. Dutch and French transfer mechanism formed the most important channel of remittance for the receipts of the servants of the Company until 1778. The Directors wrote in 1767 and in 1769 that their servants must have been providing foreign ships with their cargoes thus prejudicing the interest of their masters. During the period from 1772 to 1778 trade transactions of Chevalier, French Governor at Chandernagore, and Ross, Dutch Director at Chinsura, were linked up with the private trade of some of the most prominent men in the East India Company's service including Warren Hastings and Charles Grant. Pitt's India Act (Sections 44 and 45) laid down that the East India Company's servants in India might be proceeded against in England for acts done and presents or gifts received in India. In his speech on India Bill in the House of Commons Pitt said that "the government should be armed with the power of examining the parties charged as delinquents by interrogatories as to the value of their effects





..... it should also be armed with the power of examining the amount of any man's property on his arrival in England from India". The creation of the Board of Control gave rise to a great reluctance among Anglo-Indian officials to buy foreign bills of exchange. Arrangements were also made for the payment of the Company's servants' savings in London through the Company's securities. The servants of the Company employed in the revenue and judicial branches were now forbidden to carry on private trade. In the commercial branch Cornwallis re-introduced the agency system but granted commissions upon the investment and strictly regulated the private trade of the servants of the Company. They were to deal only on their own stock as merchants and not to take any commission from others as agents. They were to distinguish between the Company's provision and their own. They were not to make Company's prices a standard for their own trade, not to trade directly or indirectly in the name of any other person, not to sell goods in their own aurung or send them to any foreign settlement. Every servant in the commercial branch, engaged in private trade, was to make a full statement of the gross amount of money invested by him. Adequate compensation was made for the loss of private trade to all the servants of the Company in different branches by making provision for more than adequate salary. A servant of the Company, under this system, was no longer able to make a fortune in a small space of time—"a million or half a million in two or three years"<sup>42</sup> but he was able to acquire a 'handsome independency'. The emoluments of the collectors would on an average amount to Rs. 3,000/- a month. A member of the Board of Trade could earn 58,000 current rupees a year. British Free Merchants also found very profitable openings in the indigo and opium trade. Thus these two rivals of the Company in the field of European investment were eliminated. Cornwallis thus succeeded in creating a new tradition of honesty. He knew that rich men do not pilfer.

The Dutch lost their pre-eminence in saltpetre trade after the battle of Plassey. Mir Jafar issued a *parwana* giving the British the sole right to the manufacture of saltpetre. The authority of their *gomastahs* was established in all the saltpetre lands. Opium trade in Bihar passed into the hands of the English chief in Patna and his Council. After their defeat at Biderra the Dutch made complete submission. They were allowed to trade freely in everything except saltpetre. By an agreement in 1767 they received 23,000 maunds of saltpetre annually at a fixed price. The Dutch were, however, in a very convenient position in one respect. Every servant of the Company wanted Dutch bills of exchange for the remittance of his fortune. The Dutch were therefore not in want of money for investment and they had not to import bullion. The Dutch export of cotton piece goods and raw silk increased. There was very considerable improvement in their investment. Kelsall from Dacca wrote to Verelst in September 18, 1767, "the Dutch at Dacca have commissioned an Armenian to the amount of near seven lakhs of rupees. So enormous a



sum might be thought even beyond the capacity of an Armenian to presume to invest ..... they must necessarily purchase at an advanced price"<sup>43</sup>. The Dutch were very much aware of the fact that they could not afford to have serious quarrels with British agents. But the outbreak of Anglo-American war eliminated this Dutch competition. Dutch investment was to the extent of about forty lakhs in the sixties and seventies. When they again took up this export trade business in 1784 they found the British East India Company and British private traders more securely entrenched than ever. The Company's servants were no longer interested in making remittance through the Dutch. The Dutch could not also become carriers for British private traders like the Danes. They had no imports, they could not bring out bullion and they could not get money here for their investment. The Dutch therefore disappeared from competition.

The French East India Company and French private traders did brisk business from 1764 to 1769. After 1769 there was no French East India Company but French private traders could trade on the capital of the servants of the English East India Company who wanted to buy French bills of exchange, if they could not buy Dutch bills. The state of things changed completely after 1778. A new French Company began to operate in Bengal after 1784. It was prepared to import bullion. The French claimed that they were entitled to the same rights and privileges as the Dutch, the same rights and privileges which the English enjoyed before 1765"<sup>44</sup>. There was friction. The French complained particularly against British private traders who were servants of the British East India Company. The French introduced some amount of competition again in the external trade of Bengal. But after the outbreak of the French Revolution and subsequent hostilities between England and France all French trade activity in India ceased. The East India Company's investment was not unimpeded by competition of British private traders or French or Dutch East India Company's agents. The Danes were not in a position to take advantage of this situation. In the words of Vicomte de Souillac: "The Commerce of Bengal and the Coasts of Orissa and Coromandal became as exclusively her own (Britain's) as the rights of sovereignty and territorial revenues"<sup>45</sup>.

It has been argued that "there is not a shred of evidence to prove that goods for export to Europe during the decade 1783-1793 were ever really bought by the Company with a true surplus of revenue over expenditure"<sup>46</sup>. We would do well to quote an extract from a report signed by Edward Parry and Charles Grant on 26th January, 1808 which was submitted to Robert Dundas—"It has not been unusual to ascribe the increase of the debt in a considerable degree to the Company's Indian Investment for the provision of which it has been alleged that they had not a sufficient capital of their own and that when a surplus failed to be received from Indian revenue, there was no way of procuring investment but by borrowing money in India. This misconception has been repeatedly corrected





and there is a statement now preparing to show what has been done with all the moneys received on any account whatsoever into the Indian treasury since the year 1793-94 upto the latest period which statement we have no doubt would irrefragably prove that *very little of any even of the earlier Indian debt is to be charged to the Investment* and with respect to the debt contracted since the year 1798-99 which is 15½ millions of the total debt of 28½ millions the accompanying account will show that the Investment is chargeable with no part of it<sup>47</sup>.

### CURRENCY 1757-1833.

The currency was ill-regulated from 1757 to 1793. Under the Mughal system, as it obtained in Bengal in 1757, the sicca coin which weighed about 175 grains of silver sank gradually in three years in the proportion of 116 to 111 until they became sonauts. The undervaluation of all siccas of an earlier date than the current year became established. But there was triennial re-coinage and the Nawabs of Bengal did not debase coins for temporary gain. But land-revenue had to be paid in siccas of the current year. Besides these sicca and sonaut rupees there were other varieties of coins brought into circulation on account of Bengal's favourable balance of trade with other parts of India. Many of these rupees from other parts of India—Arcot, Benares, Coochbehar, Lucknow, Madras, Surat—were debased. Because of the fluctuating value of the different species of money that passed in payment in Bengal the English felt that it might be necessary to fix an imaginary coin called current rupee. It was current only in commercial circles in Calcutta. This current rupee was valued at or  $\frac{100}{110}$  parts of the sicca rupee. Arcots were valued at 108, sonauts at 111, siccas of the second year at 113, siccas of the first year at 116. The term *batta* was used sometimes to signify a proportional denomination, at other time an arbitrary and disproportional denomination. Shroffage was necessary in order to correct the inconveniences which attended an ill-regulated currency. Coins were valued in old days in weight and fineness. "What perplexed and confused it now was denomination"<sup>48</sup>. The problem was to give denominations to coins in proportion to their weight and fineness.

The Court of Directors wanted the abolition of *batta* on sonauts (11th November, 1768—from Court). Their servants in Bengal felt acutely the problem of scarcity of silver. Experiments at bimetallism were made in 1766 as also in 1769. The experiments failed because of the arbitrary valuation of gold. Gresham's law operated. The Directors repeated their order again on 10th April, 1771 for regulating the *batta* on sonauts. The currency policy of Hastings was one mint and one regnal year. The Dacca, Patna and Murshidabad mints were closed and sicca coins were issued only



from the Calcutta mint. The unvarying date on coins was the 19th year of the reign of Shah Alam. Hastings thought he had succeeded in securing uniformity in sicca coinage. He only added to the existing confusion in the currency system and the controlling influence of the shroffs. The stamp 19th year of Shah Alam, an unvarying date, did not help. The insertion of the correct Hijra year defeated the purpose for which the same 19th sun was put on all the coins of the subsequent years. With the other three mints closed, the zamindars and farmers of revenue paying land-revenue in terms of their agreement in sicca rupees had to buy them from the shroffs at a high price. It was not possible for landlords to send coins of various denominations which they collected from their tenants to far off Calcutta to be recoinced as sicca coins. In distant parts of Bengal sonauts obtained currency, in some areas arcots. Scarcity of supply from one mint where old and light rupees of different denominations could not be sent for recoinage very naturally made some specie or species the settled measure and standard in particular districts. In those areas other coins came to be considered as bullion. In different districts different coins became current. Confusion thus became consolidated. The government was compelled to fix a table of rates of batta between various coins in circulation and sicca coins for the use of officers in charge of collection, thus legalizing this confusion. The Collector of Dacca put thirty-six varieties into eleven classes. Wholesale remonetization was the remedy but the Court of Directors was not prepared to incur the expenditure involved. In 1789-90 Cornwallis reopened the mints at Patna, Dacca and Murshidabad and appointed a Mint Committee. The Committee recommended that the various species of old and light coins should be drawn into the mints with a view to establishing the general currency of the sicca rupees. Public notice was given to this appeal. Counterfeiting, clipping, drilling or defacing the coins were made punishable offence. Coins were to have the whole inscription on the surface and the edges of the coins were milled. In all government transactions sicca rupees were to become the only legal tender of payments, and no private transaction was to be recognised in law courts after 10th April 1794 in any other specie of rupees excepting 19 Sun Sicca. As no loophole was left, the ascendancy acquired by the shroffs came to an end. During all these years the ryot, the talukdar and the zamindar had suffered very considerable hardship. The Company also perhaps suffered some loss in making provision for investment in certain areas. But as land-revenue settlements were made in sicca rupees there was no direct loss in land-revenue collection. This currency reform, however, became very urgent when the government made a permanent settlement of land-revenue with a view to raising the value of landed property and encouraging capital investment in land. The coin must be kept to its proper standard. The old current rupee, the money of account, disappeared with effect from 1st May, 1794.

The problem of scarcity of silver which was sought to be solved in 1766 and 1769 by issuing gold coins failed because gold was overvalued.





In any case it was not possible to maintain a fixed ratio between the gold mohur and the sicca rupee. Gold coinage was suspended in 1777 but the mint was reopened again for gold coinage in 1780. Cornwallis tried to have bimetallism in 1792. He extended gold currency to the mofussil areas even of half and quarter mohurs. He fixed the exchange value of 16 sicca rupees for one gold mohur. But he very soon found that even the smallest possible gold coin would not circulate in Bengal. But during the period of wholesale recoinage these gold coins did some money work. Gold mohurs continued in Bengal but they were received by convention only. In 1810 minting of gold coins was restricted. In 1818 coinage of pagodas or small gold coins for use in Southern India was stopped. There was scarcely any gold coin in circulation in India though the right to pay gold coins in treasuries was not withdrawn till January 1, 1853. In the remote districts of Bengal the currency consisted entirely of silver and cowries. Hastings introduced copper coins as subsidiary currency. They gradually displaced cowries as the small change coins. In 1835 by the coining of 50 million pieces in one year the old sicca currency was entirely replaced—weight and fineness  $11/12$  or 165 grains of pure silver and  $1/12$  or 15 grains of alloy.”

#### INDIAN INDUSTRIES 1757-1793.

Cotton piecegoods formed the linchpin of Bengal's economy during the eighteenth century. In the days of Alivardi there was readiness of sales, full competition among the English, the Dutch and the French, the Armenian and Indian traders. In the words of Orme this manufacture was less liable to outrages than any other trade. Bolts writes, “There is a gentleman now in England who in the time of the Nabob has purchased in the Dacca province in one morning eight hundred pieces of muslin at his own door as brought to him by weavers of their own accord”. The harassment by *gomastahs* or British agents in charge of investment increased after Plassey. But in Dacca, Santipore and other places where the Company's investment was exposed to the full competition of European and Asiatic rivals and private traders the condition of weavers was not bad on the whole upto 1778. Monopoly conditions gradually developed. For some time, during the years 1771-1773, there was some talk of giving full freedom to all weavers and manufacturers. But the state of things remained practically unchanged. Advances to weavers really meant pre-emption. The Company's servants, who were engaged in private trade, utilised their position as investment agents. The weavers were not given the wages of their labour. It was generally argued that it was not possible to outbid interlopers. So some discretionary authority should be vested in the Company's agents with a view to enabling them to provide the investment of requisite quality in time. There was a crop of regulations in 1782, 1786, 1787 and 1789. It was provided that “a list



or register of the weavers employed by the Company in every pargana with their places of abode shall be stuck up by the Commercial Agents there, in the cutchery of their pargana." Upon the weavers failing to deliver cloth according to the stated period the Company's agent was to place peons upon them. Aggrieved weavers might complain to the Commercial Resident or to the Collector but groundless complaints would be duly punished. If a weaver was deficient in the stipulated delivery he would be prosecuted in the Diwani Adalats, if adjudged guilty he would forfeit all the produce of the cloths and he must also complete his engagements. The subservience of the country courts in disputes where the Company was the complainant was very well known.

The weavers felt that they were being enslaved but they had been led step by step to this situation and circumstances had shaped in such a way that they depended very much upon the work which the Company would give. The Company's investment in cotton piecegoods amounted to about 67 lakhs on an average in the eighties and nineties of the eighteenth century. The Board of Trade at Calcutta boasted in 1790 "The Court of Directors are requested to call for a piece of fine, superfine *allabally*, superfine *nyansook jungle*, fine superfine *terrindams*, *abroan*, and *buddan cass* and judge if ever anyone of them saw themselves or were authentically informed of any cotton cloth manufacture in any other part of the world being equal in fineness and beauty to these articles". Dacca muslins could be worn for double the time of any variety of cloth. Everytime they were washed they appeared superior. This industrious, skilful group of workers, who were denied under monopoly conditions the price of their labour, did not know that the process of their wholesale extinction had begun.

Spinning was practised entirely by women. They spun when they were free from domestic care. The finest kinds of thread were made by the spindle and the coarser kind by the wheel. As thread was spun in the interval of domestic work it was produced cheaper than any other commodity which required manual skill.

Raw silk was an article of investment, next in importance to cotton piecegoods. Wrought silk had disappeared quite early from investment. Weiss, a capable silk manufacturer from England, was sent to Bengal to bring about improvements in the production of raw silk. He was served by four Italian experts. They were stationed at Kumarkhali and established silk filatures in different parts of Bengal. East India Company's silk investment was of two varieties—filature silk and old traditional Bengal wound silk. In the nineties of the eighteenth century raw silk investment gave occupation to a larger number of silk winders and cocoon growers. The investment amounted on an average to twenty-five lakhs a year. Bengal raw and wrought silk which had a ready market in the Nizam's dominions lost it. The Company's demand increasing the price,





the wrought silk manufacturers in the Nizam's dominions found it cheaper to buy China silk.

Saltpetre was another item of export. In Bihar the Company had five factories which could manufacture from 130,000 to 150,000 maunds. The Company first made purchases by contract with its own servants and they by the agency of their servants. Purchases were made from the *Assamees* who bought from the *nooneahs*, the average price at the factory being about Rs. 1-12 as per maund. Any purchaser would have willingly paid Rs. 2-8 to Rs. 5/- per maund. Clandestine inland sales could not therefore be prevented altogether. The British supplied saltpetre to the French and the Dutch at the rate of Rs. 3-8 as. per maund.

Salt was manufactured in Bengal along the whole coastal belt from Balasore to Chittagong, in Tamruk, Hijli, 24-Parganas, Noakhali, Sandip, Chittagong. Bengal produced on an average about 28 lakhs of maunds. The Bengal salt market belt included Bihar, Assam, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and possibly Tibet. The government had a monopoly over salt manufacture throughout Bengal. The *Malangis* or salt producers worked their salt pans under British agency supervision. In 1796-97 the average price of Bengal salt was Rs. 308 per 100 mds. The Bengal variety was boiled salt. Salt was being imported in considerable quantities—about 6 lakhs of maunds from Vizagapatam, Rajahmundry, Nellore, Covelong and Tanjore. This salt was of a cheaper variety—karkutch, which was made by solar evaporation. This salt import threatened the Bengal salt monopoly of the Company but it was tolerated because it was of considerable assistance to British ship-owners engaged in coasting trade.

The impact of the Industrial Revolution in England upon the investment policy of the East India Company began in the eighties of the eighteenth century. In 1782 the calico printers put pressure upon the Directors to prohibit the importation of printed goods from Bengal. The Directors agreed to do so in the first instance for four years. In 1783 muslin was manufactured in Manchester and, as the Directors wrote, it was 'twenty percent under our own'. The Court felt that the export of middling and coarse assortments was doomed. In 1786 cotton yarn disappeared from Investment. The Court of Directors thought of substitutes—raw cotton, raw silk, sugar, indigo, tobacco, hemp, flax and jute as substitutes but none of these goods promised substantial investment. Indigo cultivation was fostered by the Company but in the nineties it was in the hands of Free Merchants and it was a growing branch of trade, a staple export in private trade to Europe. Opium, produced in Bihar, was the Company's monopoly but the sale of it in China was in the hands of private traders. About the end of the eighteenth century the annual sale of 'Bengal' opium was about 4000 chests of two maunds each. But in the nineteenth century the growers of poppy in Bihar became as anxious to avoid growing poppy as were the growers of indigo in Bengal. A close governmental monopoly of the produce of opium and unrestricted competi-





tion among growers of indigo led curiously enough to the same effects—coercion of the ryot and unremunerative return to the cultivator.

### DECLINE OF INDIAN INDUSTRIES 1793-1833.

"It was not the policy of the East India Company to foster Indian industries". The Directors could not afford to ignore organized pressure groups in England. As early as 1769 it was decided to encourage raw silk production and discourage wrought silk production in Bengal. In 1813 at the time of the renewal of the Company's charter it was clear that the parliament wanted that British industries should be promoted at the expense of Indian industries though there was expression of solicitude for the general welfare of the Indian people. Warren Hastings, Thomas Munro and Sir John Malcolm were asked questions about the possible extent of demand for British commodities in India. Wellesley tried during his regime to create a market for British goods by exhibiting them in fairs at Rohilkhand and Hardwar. Prohibitive tariffs shut out Indian manufactures from England. The duty on calicos for home consumption was £78.6s.8d. per cent, on muslin £31.6s.8d. per cent. This was protective duty to encourage manufactures in England. Charles Grant, who was spokesman for the Company in the Charter debates in England in 1813 and gave evidence before the Select Committee on Trade in 1821, told the Committee that the British cotton industry had grown up under laws that protected it from Indian competition and he admitted that if they were under an Indian prince Indians would impose protective duties upon British cotton piecegoods in their own markets as they had done in theirs. But the mills of Paisley and Manchester were not stopped in their outset. Cotton and silk goods which could be sold for a profit in the British market at a price from fifty to sixty per cent lower than those that were fabricated in England were kept out of the English market and when they could weave by means of machinery and power much cheaper than the Indians they said to them 'leave off weaving, supply us with the raw material. We will weave for you'<sup>30</sup>. 'The subjects' economy must now take a new shape. Charles Grant had written in 1807—"A dependent territory must fall under that system of regulation which the paramount state in a combined view to its general interests sees best on the whole."<sup>31</sup>

Muslin was first affected. In 1801 cloth investment in Dacca was reduced to about 3 lakhs. In 1814-15 investment in Bengal muslin was totally discontinued and Company's investment in Dacca and Santipore stopped altogether. Export of Calicos continued for some time but gradually came to an end. In his *Report upon the Inland Customs and Town duties of the Bengal Presidency* (1835) Trevelyan gives the following figures of displacement first in the foreign market and then in the home market.





Years	Cotton goods (exported) Rs.	(Napoleonic war checked re-export to Europe)	Cotton goods (imported)	Twist (imported)
1813/14	52,91,458	}	9,070	—
1814/15	84,90,760		45,000	—
1815/16	1,31,51,427		2,63,800	—
1816/17	1,65,94,380		3,17,602	—
1817/18	1,32,72,854		11,22,372	—
1818/19	1,15,27,385		26,58,940	—
1819/20	90,30,796		15,82,353	—
1820/21	85,40,763		25,59,642	—
1821/22	76,64,820		46,78,650	—
1822/23	80,09,732		65,82,351	—
1823/24	58,70,533		37,20,540	1st year of importation
1824/25	60,17,559		52,96,816	1,23,145
1825/26	58,34,638		41,24,159	75,276
1826/27	39,48,422		43,46,054	8,82,743
1827/28	28,76,313		52,52,793	19,11,205
1828/29	22,23,163		79,96,383	35,22,640
1829/30	13,26,423		52,16,226	15,55,321
1830/31	8,57,280		60,12,729	31,12,138
1831/32	8,49,887		45,64,047	42,85,517
1832/33	8,22,891		42,64,707	23,87,807

Trevelyan commented : the trifling quantity of piece goods which Bengal still exported is for the most part made from English twist".

The loss of Indian market was explained by Trevelyan in the following words : "In Mughal times transit duties were tolls rather than duties, collected according to the distance travelled, in small instalments." This new regulation (Sec. 30 Reg. IX. 1810) aggregated all the instalments on goods travelling the greatest distance. It was a frightful augmentation. There was an endless multiplication of chokeys or customs outposts. Inland trade was thus rendered intricate, dangerous and disreputable during the years 1810-33. By the Charter Act of 1813 British imported goods paid 2½ p.c. but no corresponding reduction was made in internal duties. Cotton piece goods in the Bengal Presidency still paid 17 ½ p.c.—5 p.c. on the raw material, 7½ p.c. on the yarn, 2½ p.c. on the plain and 2½ p.c. on the dyed cloth. This was in effect an encouragement of English at the expense of local Indian manufacturer. It is no wonder that Indian piecegoods lost their home market so very rapidly in this unequal struggle. The anomaly of foreign goods enjoying a preference in the home market undoubtedly helped to bring this about. The total displacement of Bengal piecegoods in the Indian market and the foreign market has been estimated



by Trevelyan at a crore and eighty lakhs. This happened between 1813 and 1833. Was nature only the true commercial legislator? Was not political supremacy utilised to bring about this commercial ascendancy? The sword of Brennus was thrown into the scale, not with the words "woe to the vanquished", but perhaps with a smile "This is for your benefit".

Two officers of the customs department in their note on Trevelyan Report which was submitted for the consideration of the Governor-General made this very clear. They were not prepared to agree with Trevelyan's views on the paralysing influence of existing customs regulations on national prosperity because they could show by means of statistical tables that the official returns of the value of inland commerce had increased since the date of the existing customs regulation in 1809-10 from Rs. 23,456,021 in 1809-10 to Rs. 52,333,470 in 1831. They were perhaps not prepared to agree that goods which escaped the net before could not now do so. They could not deny that the great inequalities between the inland duties and the import duties on British goods were 'real and crying evils', bad and injurious to the country, but their main argument was that inland customs brought the government an income of Rs. 36,87,580 which the government could not afford to forego. They further argued: "We think it rather a hasty assumption to ascribe the low state of manufacturing industry to the restrictions of our customs system. We think the probabilities are that as in all semi-barbarous countries the manufacturing industries of India will decline in proportion as its intercourse with a civilized manufacturing country increases, and that the attention of the people will rather be turned to the improvement of raw produce exchangeable for the manufactured goods of England." From the remarks of these two officers we learn for the first time that South America ceased to be a market for Indian produce because the coarse cotton piece-goods "which formed so vast a proportion of our consignments to South America could not long continue to make head against the manufacturers of Glasgow and Manchester; there is no raw produce that we can expect to export from India to South America, when therefore the exportation of piecegoods failed all exportation failed to that quarter".

Britain 'innundated the very mother country of cotton with cottons'. Thus took place an economic revolution—a displacement in which weavers, spinners, dyers, bleachers, cotton producers, needle-workers became all affected—their sufferings were without any parallel in the history of commerce. In the *Samachar Durpan*, 5th July 1828 we have the petition of a distressed widow who used to support a family of six from her income from her spinning wheel but now found herself in a desperate situation on account of the import of cotton yarn from England. In her simplicity she wrote, "I was told that all the people in England are rich but now I find that there must be women in England who are poorer and more unfortunate than us, who cannot sell their yarn in their own markets and send this to India to be sold so cheaply here to our



utter ruin. I beg to draw the attention of the spinners there to my petition and request them not to send their yarn to this country''. The cry of distress from rural areas as the cottage industries died out could not certainly move the British industrialists into sentimental humanitarianism. British Indian commercial policy could not be deviated from its course by widows' petitions and paupers' cries. Public opinion in India was too inarticulate in this respect and too ineffective to count. The population of Dacca, the Manchester of India, the seat of the muslin industry, was halved in 16 years. In 1813, the Chaukidari tax was paid on 21,361 houses at Dacca, in 1830 on 10,708 houses.

Depression in the Company's silk trade ended in 1807. Italian raw silk was no longer imported into England on account of Napoleon's Continental system. Demand for Bengal silk naturally increased. After the cessation of hostilities in Europe, and the growing decline of trade in cotton piece goods, the Company invested the greatest part of the funds in silk trade. But increased export meant deteriorating quality. A momentary demand led to over-expansion—Kumarkhali, Rangpur, Rampur-Boalia (Rajshahi), Malda, Jangipur, Cossimbazar, Gonatea in Birbhum and Radhanagar in Midnapur were the chief silk producing centres. After 1813 private traders made some progress in silk business. East India Company's silk business in Bengal was wound up after 1833. Private silk business continued for some time more and afforded some employment to the inhabitants at a time when cotton manufacture was declining very rapidly. But the old established centres of cotton industry like Dacca, Santipore, Luckipore did not become established centres of silk industry. The last of the expiring Indian manufactures was silk. The duty on British silk manufactures in Calcutta was  $3\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. that on Indian silk manufactures in England was 20 p.c. The Ellenborough Committee of the House of Lords in 1840 did not recommend equalising the duties on silk manufactures. Indian silk piece goods in the grey were imported into England, printed there and then exported to other European countries. Indian printed pocket silk handkerchiefs were re-exported to France, the Frenchmen preferring Indian silk handkerchiefs to British. Equalising of duties would help Indian silk manufacture. So this was not done and this branch of silk industry was to die out. It was not considered 'good legislation to take away our labour and to give it to the East Indian because his condition is worse than ours'—this was the line of argument.

The Company wanted to have sugar as an article of investment. This was provided by contract and there was export not only to the British market but also to Africa, Europe and America. Sugarcane cultivation extended from Benares to Rangpur but sugar production was concentrated in Bihar and Benares. Many European sugar factories grew up in Bihar. There was a decline of sugar export during the period 1805-1815. In 1826-27 the export of Bengal sugar increased to about 18 lakhs of rupees. Sugar from Calcutta port was exported to England inspite of heavy duty and excessive freight charges. East India sugar was placed on an equal



footing with sugar from West Indies in the British market in respect of duties in 1836. But sugar required more capital than indigo. C. D'oyly and H. M. Parker of the Board of Customs, Salt and Opium put it very aptly—"Can cotton be produced which shall command the English market in preference to that of America? Can sugar be provided which shall rival that of the West Indies in public estimation? Can our silk compete with that of Italy?" It was not possible for these Indian products in the long run to compete in the European market.

The manufacture of salt in Bengal was the Company's monopoly with a view to revenue not trade. The salt monopoly was very much criticised in England. It was incompatible with the policy of freedom of trade, it kept prices high, the consumers suffered, salt manufacture was oppressive to the *Malangis*. Complete abolition of the monopoly was urged. The House of Commons Committee on Indian Affairs 1831-32 was of opinion that it would be desirable to encourage a supply of salt by importation without abandoning local monopoly immediately—"a compromise between a close monopoly and a free importation". They hoped that Bengal manufacture of salt would gradually decline leading ultimately to free import of salt under a customs duty. Agitation against salt monopoly continued. The import of foreign salt was encouraged, duty being reduced from Rs. 3 to Rs. 2 per maund. In *A Collection of Papers* relating to the salt revenue which was published in 1836 there is a minute by the junior member of the Board of Customs, Salt and Opium. It was a sustained argument in favour of the continuance of the monopoly. He pointed out that in the sale of May 1834 Liverpool salt was priced at Rs. 382-13-4 per 100 md. and Tumlook (Tamluk) boiled salt was Rs. 377-4-3 per 100 mds. In the November sale of 1834 Liverpool salt was Rs. 367-3-6 per 100 mds. and Tumlook boiled salt was Rs. 372-0-0. In May 1835 sale Hijli boiled was Rs. 394-3-0 per 100 mds. and Liverpool boiled was Rs. 393-0-0 per 100 mds. This report was published by order of the government of Bengal. But it contains the following remarkable expression of opinion—"I may assume that notwithstanding the never slumbering selfishness of the English people and their astonishing disregard of all that concerns the welfare of this country only it would be impossible to advocate or work into form the scheme of treating salt as many other articles of local produce have been treated viz. levying a heavy tax upon the country and a very light one on the imported commodity". The Madras salt import was essentially an English private trade venture because of the freight—"Essentially English that is essentially selfish" in the words of the report. The report further pointed out that there was no adequate ware housing of the article. There was no class of master manufacturers. If great salt works could be established in the place of '*hereditary choolah*' there would be less unequal competition. But this was not to be. A close governmental monopoly was not conducive to such developments. The manufacture of salt by reason of the government monopoly administration was so soaked in extravagance compared with privately manufactured Cheshire salt that the importer had



always an advantage in his favour. The ardour for free trade continued. The interest of British salt manufacturer and shipping trade was paramount and the inexorable economic law was thus allowed to operate. Tamluk and Hijli were capable of supplying half the demand of Bengal when monopoly was later abandoned but not the salt tax which pressed so much upon the consumers. The net public revenue from the salt tax in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa amounted to one million and a quarter sterling in 1833.

Saltpetre monopoly was no longer profitable to the Company. After 1814 it was abandoned. There was an increase in the number of private manufacturers of saltpetre. In 1819-20 the export was valued at 14 lakhs. It fell to 11 lakhs about 1827. Private trade exports gradually declined from 1829.

Shipbuilding industry was revived in Bengal in 1781 by Colonel Watson who built the ship *Non Such*. Between 1761 and 1821 two hundred and thirty five ships were constructed in Calcutta. Most of these ships were engaged in Asiatic trade. A ban on Indian shipping in Indo-British trade was imposed in 1814. In 1813 there were some Bengali shipowners—Ramdulal Dey, Panchoo Dutt, Ramgopal Mullick, Madan Dutt. Lack of encouragement, advent of steamships, restriction of shipbuilding, gradually led to the complete disappearance of 'country' shipbuilding in Bengal.

#### A NEW STRUCTURE OF EXTERNAL TRADE AND A NEW FINANCIAL SET UP

Indigo became the principal article of export to England, the commodity market being almost exclusively dominated by British private traders in the Bengal Presidency. In 1800 forty thousand maunds of indigo were exported from Calcutta to England, in 1815 one hundred and twenty thousand, between 1826-30 on an average about one hundred and eighteen thousand. In 1810 Calcutta price was one hundred thirty rupees per maund. In 1824, it rose to three hundred and thirty rupees. There was a slump in 1829 and London price dropped from 10s. a lb. to 3s. 7d. Calcutta was the world's chief supplier of indigo. It was produced in the delta regions of lower Bengal and Bihar. According to Buchanan Hamilton there were about 300/400 factories in Bengal. Cultivation was gradually extended even beyond Bihar. The indigo planters developed very unhappy relations with Indian labour. European adventurers' avid for wealth, in direct contact with the peasantry in Bengal and Bihar created these problems of relationship. For more than half a century oppression and lawlessness remained associated with indigo plantations. The offensive features of indigo cultivation by Europeans developed almost from the beginning. As early as 1793 some ryots complained of having advances forced on them. This was the beginning of what was later described as indigo slavery. Indigo became almost entirely a forced cultivation.

The East India Company confined itself to the production of opium in India—in Bihar. The distribution of opium in China was left to private



traders. In 1800-01 3224 chests (2 mds. each) of Bengal opium were despatched to China. In 1834-35 10,207 chests. Opium has been described as the "favourite concubine for many years of the Indian government. She supplied her master with a seventh of his annual revenues and roused him on her behalf to two wars against China."<sup>52</sup>

In the last years of the Company's monopoly of China trade the amount of tea sold in England averaged thirty million pounds. The Company's treasury at Canton took specie from British private merchants which their sale of Indian goods—opium from Bengal and raw cotton from Bombay—yielded and gave in return bills on the Court of Directors or on the Government of Bengal. The opium sale proceeds very much exceeded the tea investment of the Company. The country ships returning in ballast brought China bills which could find a ready market in Calcutta and bills of exchange on private account to the opium exporters. The China trade thus became a channel of remittance from Calcutta to London via Canton. "In 1833 it was declared that the trade between India and China was three times the value of that between England and China."<sup>53</sup> During these years 1813-1833 India became flooded with Manchester goods. Therefore this mode of remittance via China became very popular. It was pointed out in 1836 that "the China trade employed 100,000 tons of British shipping" and found vent for Indian products "which enables our Indian subjects to consume our manufactures on a largely increased scale". The Canton System 'tripped and fell' and the first Anglo-Chinese War 1840-42 ended the limited contacts of the eighteenth century' and led to the expanding contacts of the nineteenth.

The opium traffic, this country trade between India and China, helped the growth of agency houses. Before the age of agency houses developed, the banians acted as agents and middlemen for the East India Company's servants and British Free Merchants. The banians supplied capital, acted as brokers for Englishmen engaged in private trade. Many of them were prominent inland traders in partnership with Englishmen. But in the last decade of the eighteenth century the East India Company's servants were no longer engaged in inland trade. With indigo and opium becoming staple commodities in the external trade of the Free Merchants the banians' role became very restricted. Moreover, the Company's servants and Free Merchants had by now accumulated so much capital that they wanted to invest at least part of it in such lucrative business as the export of indigo to Europe and of opium to China. Many of the agency houses were formed by ex-servants of the Company.

Agency houses represent the second stage of the growth of the Englishman's commercial ventures in India. The pagoda tree was to put forth new blossoms. In 1790 there were 15 agency houses in Calcutta. "They controlled the country trade, financed indigo and sugar manufacture, covered the government contracts, ran three banks and four insurance companies at Calcutta and speculated in public securities"<sup>54</sup>. Trade with China in opium and raw cotton and trade with Europe in indigo became



their preserve. The Company's servants were no longer in private trade but the agency houses could draw upon their income. Agency houses thrived on borrowed capital. Indigo planters, cotton dealers, opium agents were their constituents. Palmer and Company had indigo plantations all over Bengal. They had six ships. The Fairlies controlled country shipping in Calcutta, ran a bank. The Alexanders controlled the Bank of Hindustan. They lent planters money at 10 to 12 p.c. interest. They also depended on the savings of the Company's servants and whenever they were very hard-pressed they took loans from shroffs. They also turned to government which was very sympathetic towards them whenever they found themselves in great difficulty. Agency houses were in reality distributors of capital rather than the possessors of it. They made their profits in the usual course of trade and by the difference of interest between lending and borrowing and by commerce. The East India Company controlled the credit market by its increasing debt operations. The policy of debt transfer made the public securities very valuable to the Europeans as a means of remittance and the 'natives' practically became insignificant holders of public securities. These securities held by the Europeans were deposited with the Agency houses and they also took to stock-jobbing.

The Bengal government was very much committed to agency house interest. When they were in a very tight corner before the outbreak of the Anglo-Nepalese War the Government advanced a loan to the agency houses. As the war dragged on the government forced from the Nawab Wazir of Oudh a loan of one crore but spent 48 lakhs out of this sum for the payment of loans with a view to relieving scarcity in the money-market, thus relieving agency house distress for cash. Then came a period of indigo and opium boom, and resultant over-speculation and over-production. By 1818 imports for the first time began to exceed exports. This increased the extent of capital which could be remitted. Exchange fell from 2s. 6d. in 1819 to 2s. 3d. in 1820. The Agency houses were affected. The government again tried to help them by floating a loan which might absorb the remittable surplus. John Palmer and Company began a collusive loan transaction with the Nizam's *Darbar* at usurious interest of 25 p.c. and even more. The Agency houses became unable to meet the planters' demand for capital and private traders' demand for profitable remittance. The government's debt policy in 1823, reduction of interest on public debt to 5 p.c., and permission given to Bengal Bank to give greater credit facilities—helped agency houses to get cheap capital at less than 8 p.c. But in their enthusiasm the agency houses invested their borrowed capital in permanent objects like indigo concerns and expanded their plantations until many of them became uneconomic. This indigo boom created further distress for the peasantry because marginal concerns were faced very soon with the problem of survival and the full brunt of the rivalry between contending planters had to be borne by the peasants. To crown all came the Anglo-Burmese War which began in 1824. To relieve pres-



sure on the money market Amherst succeeded in persuading the Nawab Wazir to lend a crore at 5 p.c. The Burmese War ended in 1826. But the government continued to be in financial difficulty. The Nawab Wazir of Oudh had to pay 50 lakhs more as a loan and the inevitable pressure on the money market which would affect the agency houses could be relieved. But there was very soon a fall in Bengal raw material prices in the London market, a stagnation of country trade. The agency houses could not withdraw capital from their marginal indigo concerns. The partners of agency houses in England began to withdraw their capital to England. Some of the biggest agency houses like Davidson & Company, became bankrupt. There was a chain reaction. Even the corrupt monetary transactions of Palmer & Company at Haiderabad could not save it from collapse. The Palmer & Company fell at the beginning of 1830. Private British trade in Bengal was largely in the hands of these agency houses. If they all became bankrupt the servants of the Company who put their money in these houses would be ruined. It was therefore regarded by the government as a national emergency. Bentinck was very much anxious to come to the rescue of private British capital in Bengal. The total number of indigo factories in the Bengal Presidency was 899, the European owners 119, European assistants 354.<sup>55</sup> Amherst's Regulation VI, 1823 had already given the planters the right to recover advances with interest by a summary suit from the indigo crop. But the planters still continued to feel that they must take the law into their own hands and they frequently did it and compelled the ryots by force to meet their demands. Regulation V of 1830 was passed by Bentinck's government with a view to compelling indigo ryots to carry out specific performance of contract with all its harsh conditions. This was, as the Court of Directors pointed out, dispensing with the ordinary course of law in favour of the planters. The contract was always unfair to the ryot. This attempt to relieve the difficulties of European commercial houses amounted to 'class legislation'. There was trade depression in England and continuous fall in indigo prices. The agency houses fell one by one—the Alexanders, the Mackintoshes, the Colvins. The Fergussons fell in 1833 and the Cruttendens in 1834. The Agency houses rested on a foundation of quicksand, 'exposed to every gust of wind, commercial or financial'. A new financial set up was necessary with more secure foundations for British capital investment and this was ensured by the Charter Act of 1833.

Indigenous banking in Bengal had played a very important role in the first half of the eighteenth century under the Jagat Seths. The Calcutta Council used to depend very much upon the Jagat Seth house for their investment before Plassey. They took loans, repaid loans, sold bullion to this house and purchased bullion from it whenever in need. No less dependent were the French and the Dutch. Even in the year of Plassey the Dutch borrowed four hundred thousand at 9 p.c. The French debt at the time of the capture of Chandernagore was a million and a half.



The country merchants as also British private traders turned to this house for the timely supply of credit. This house was the receiver and treasurer of government revenues. The zamindars borrowed whenever in need. The Seths also traded in rupees—the conversion of different varieties of coins into sicca. They were in charge of the mint and made a profit from re-monetisation, triennial recoinage being a feature of monetary arrangements. They discouraged the sale of bullion by foreign companies to others. Almost all the bankers in Bengal were either their factors or agents. In high finance the inland trade of the whole of northern India was connected by their *hundis* or bills of exchange. Their banking business was not therefore merely usury. They developed credit and helped international trade. After Plassey foreign traders no longer stood in need of their assistance. Even the French and the Dutch could dispense with their aid. They lost the control of the mint. Bullion was no longer imported. The shroffs or money-changers became independent of the control of this house. It was no longer the receptacle of the metallic hoard of the country. After the grant of the Diwani it lost all its connection with revenue payment. Very soon the house ceased to be the Company's bankers. When the state-controlled General Bank was set up by Hastings with a view to stabilising inland exchange and remittance of revenues its managers were new men—Hazari Mal and Dayal Chand. This bank did not continue its operations after sometime but that did not benefit the Jagat Seth house. The transfer of the treasury to Calcutta may be regarded as the creation of the new centre of financial gravity. Mir Qasim's attempt to create a rival financial house—the house of Bolaki Das at Murshidabad—had failed for political reasons. But in the eighties we find the firm of Monhardas Dvarkadas doing brisk business even at Murshidabad. Indigenous banking itself was being slowly driven into a corner. It was gradually confined to the granting of credit to agriculturists and artisans and the financing of the internal trade of the country. The European banks which came into existence in Bengal confined their activities almost completely to Calcutta, gave remittance and deposit facilities of which Europeans could make use. They financed European private trade external. Indigenous banking and European banking thus kept apart from each other. The collapse of the structure raised by the Jagat Seths thus created two distinct systems. There was no longer a single money-market.

Some European banks came to be established towards the end of the eighteenth century—the Bank of Hindustan in 1770, the Bengal Bank in 1784 and the General Bank of India in 1786. The European houses added a fourth function, the issue of notes, to the other three functions, acceptance of deposits, making of advances and discounting of bills. Alexander & Company, a leading agency house, started the Bank of Hindustan, which was the earliest European bank in India. This bank was a department, almost a counting house, of Alexander & Company. It could survive the banking crisis in 1791, 1819 and 1829 but it could not survive the



failure of Alexander & Company in 1832. The Calcutta Bank was started by Palmer & Company. It failed in 1829 on the fall of the Agency House. Other agency houses also established mushroom banks which shared their fate. The Bengal Bank failed in 1791. The Bank of Bengal came into existence in 1806. It received government support in 1809. It became the Chief Presidency Bank but worked under some restrictions imposed by the government. As a semi-government bank it could not afford all facilities to commerce. This led to the foundation of the Union Bank in 1829 avowedly as a commercial bank to be managed by commercial men to afford facilities to commerce which the regulations of the semi-government Bank of Bengal did not permit. All other private banks had failed. Of the twelve directors of the Union Bank four were Indians—Dwarakanath Tagore, Pramathanath Dey, Prosanna Kumar Tagore and Radhamadhab Banerjee. It made advances to indigo houses of Calcutta on the deposit of title deeds of their factories. Seven of the Directors became hopelessly indebted to the bank. Excessive credit was given to a few European firms and the purchase of their bills long after they were insolvent brought this bank down with a crash some years after. Most of the British directors were 'linked together by commercial interests centring in the bank as a focus'. The indigo system was so vicious that financial instability seemed almost inevitable. An apologist for the directors of the Union Bank tried to justify their overspeculation. He argued, "Once stop the advances (to the cultivators) and the debt and property themselves are destroyed. Continue them and (if there is) an average crop and fair prices especially of an article like indigo of which Bengal enjoys a monopoly to a considerable extent, the debt is recovered and the value of the property is maintained."<sup>56</sup> The fall of the Union Bank in 1747 was the last of the bank failures of which there was quite a crop in the twenties and thirties of the century. The financial system of those days was very much shaken. The shyness of native capital does not appear to be inexplicable in this context.

Another feature of the financial system requires to be stressed. Indigenous banking was not in the hands of the Bengalis. This has history behind it. Towards the end of the hindu period of Bengal's history Ballal Sen (1158-1179), who was responsible for giving new ranks to different castes, placed Sahukars (Savarnavaiks) low in the list. This ranking list must be regarded as one of the greatest evils in the social history of Bengal. The malign influence of this ranking list was felt ever afterwards. Bankers from other parts of India who did not care for this local orthodoxy could easily establish themselves in Bengal. These people were inclined to keep their risk capital tied to the quick turn over of internal trade and there was no encouragement of any business enterprise whatsoever.

But according to Bengal Commercial Reports of 1802-3, "the formerly timid Hindu lends money at respondentia on distant voyages, engages in speculations in various parts of the world and as an underwriter in the



different insurance offices, creates indigo works in various parts of Bengal and is just as well acquainted with the principles of British laws and enjoys moreover two great advantages over the latter, the first in trading on his own instead of a borrowed capital and secondly of conducting his business at 1/10 the expense of the European." But this phase of business activity had hardly begun before it ended. Investment in land proved to be more and more profitable in the twenties and thirties. Distraint regulations made this investment so safe. Growing population with its increasing pressure on land made landholding more and more popular among moneyed men and gradually all other forms of activity except moneylending and investment in securities stopped altogether. British capital investment in India was destined not to face rivalry in India.

The last of the Bengalis of note in overseas trade was Ramdulal Dey, who has left behind him a tradition of almost proverbial honesty. His career is intimately connected with the appearance of America in Asian trade. The first American ship appeared in Calcutta in 1785, the next in 1787. These ships were perhaps used for clandestine private British trade with Europe. By 1797 American trade from Calcutta had become so considerable that it was felt in England that foreigners were profiting from trade with India while British subjects were prevented by the Company's monopoly. According to Jay Treaty 1794—Art. XIII—vessels of U.S.A. were to be admitted to British Indian ports. They were 'not to carry articles exported by them . . . except to some port in America'. During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars neutrality was very profitable. The Jay Treaty could not prevent the American ships stopping in European ports and selling Indian goods by taking a circuitous route. American traders' demand was for medium quality piece goods from 1797 to 1808. Henry Lee was the pioneer American trader and he was acting in close collaboration with Ramdulal Dey. But the state of things changed between 1808 and 1812. The Anglo-American war of 1811-1812 stopped all this for some time. After the reopening of American trade with India there was no longer that old close cooperation between Americans and Indians. In the parliamentary debates of 1813 it was pointed out that the Americans could undersell British traders in South America and West Indies. After 1813 British freight charges were reduced and keen competition began among British private traders. Circuitous trade was no longer profitable. In the Calcutta port there was preferential treatment of British goods and British vessels. 60% to 70% duty on Bengal piece goods in America stopped direct trade. Industrial Revolution in England made medium quality British piecegoods in South American markets cheaper than American imported medium quality piecegoods from Bengal. American traders also felt that Indian trade should best be done through England. They naturally turned to British agency houses. Ramdulal Dey was the last important Bengali merchant in overseas commerce. It is perhaps relevant to note that American merchants trading in tea in China had to bring a small quantity of opium when they were purchasing



tea.<sup>57</sup> As Turkish opium was not relished in China it became perhaps convenient to turn to the British agency houses.

An Englishman boasted, "we opened the coffers of the Mughals and released the hoarded wealth of ages". The plunder was promiscuous and unchecked during the first two decades. Then investment, private trade with Europe and with other parts of Asia formed a stream for the influx of Indian treasure to England. Capital accumulated in masses. Clive's 'Plassey plunder' was rivalled, in later years, by Francis Sykes' 12 lakhs in two years at Murshidabad and Barwell's 80 lakhs in presents, perquisites and private trade. There were many others who followed their noble example. This ill-gotten wealth could easily be sent to England through the Dutch, the French and in diamond burses. Amsterdam suddenly developed into the biggest diamond market of Europe. There was a great expansion of credit in England. "Credit is the chosen vehicle of energy in centralized societies and no sooner had treasure enough accumulated in London to offer it a foundation than it shot up with marvellous rapidity" (Digby). The 'Plassey plunder' phase 1757-1772 was followed by a period in which there was excess of exports over imports during the years 1772-1813. It has been argued that this was not drain. Investment helped to maintain a quantum of industry and agriculture with a part of the state revenues. But for most of this period there existed a monopoly for the benefit of a foreign trade. The surplus revenue was advanced to those who made cloths or produced raw silk. Thus was carried away not only the original sum received but also the value of the labour of the subjects into the bargain.

Henry Dundas wrote to the Chairman of the E.I. Co. on 2nd April, 1800, "Trade never can be regulated or directed by any other certain rule than the interest of those concerned in it. But it is so much the interest and natural bent of a British subject to send his fortune to that country which gave him birth and where he means to close his days that nothing but the most unnatural and impolitic restraints can suggest to him a desire to do otherwise.

No principle ought ever to be tolerated or acted upon that does not proceed on the basis of India being considered as the temporary residence of a great British establishment for the good government of the country upon steady uniform principle and of a large British factory for the beneficial management of its trade upon rules applicable to the state and manners of the country.

From these premises the conclusion I draw that the surplus produce of India, beyond what the appropriated of the E. I. Co. can bring home should be considered as the means of transferring the fortunes of the servants in India to Great Britain.

The importance of that immense empire to this country is rather to be estimated by the great annual addition it makes to the wealth and capital of the Kingdom than by any advantages which the manufacturers of this country can derive from the consumption of the natives of India".





This was said at the end of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century the advantages derived by manufacturers of England were also of paramount consideration.

### ADMINISTRATION 1793-1883.

British administrative institutions were taking their final shape. In 1787 the number of districts was reduced from 35 to 23. But combination of power in the hands of Collector was so great that separation of power was now felt to be necessary. Revenue administration was separated in 1793 from judicial functions. Even revenue cases were to be referred to the three city and twenty three zilla courts. Their judges were now made magistrates and they were entrusted with the power to arrest criminals. But it was soon found that the separation of powers could not work well in practice. The transfer of revenue suits to the judges led to enormous increase in litigation, due to the hasty land-revenue settlement which left everything undefined, made it impossible for the judges to cope with the volume of revenue work. The Collectors' magisterial duties had also been transferred to judges of civil courts. The judges were therefore empowered in 1794 to refer revenue accounts to the enquiry of the Collectors. In 1812 the judges were asked to refer to the Collectors' cases of distrained property for report. In 1821 the Governor-General in Council was empowered to authorise a Collector to exercise the power of a magistrate. A magistrate could also be invested with the powers of a Collector. In 1822 the Collectors' judicial authority in matters connected with land-revenue was further increased. In 1829 the Collectors were placed under the authority and control of the Divisional Commissioners. Their revised powers and duties included much that might be regarded as judicial.

In the sphere of civil justice the accumulation of arrears was staggering. The number of pending suits in 1813 was 142,406. But there were many unfortunate victims of the new land-revenue system among ryots and dependent talukdars who were not in a position to seek judicial protection because of the expense, delay and other direct and indirect consequences of prolonged litigation. The state of things is best explained in the report of N. J. Halhed, Acting Judge and Magistrate of Burdwan, written in May 1814—"The Rajah having fixed the assessment to the greatest extent in his power, sells the putnees to the Sudder Putneedars who immediately proceed to rackrent the Ryots and having got some of them in their debt they cause them by threats of prosecution, sometimes by fraud, often by violence, to execute an agreement to an increase of rent having obtained which they institute a suit against the remaining tenants to fix the rate of rent per bigha and in proof of its being that established in the village they produce in court the engagement which they have by fraud or force compelled one or two of the cultivators to enter into, together with the account books of the village which, however, can never be



depended upon. Those suits being generally below the amount tried by the Registrar are referred to the head commissioner (who are not in the district with the exception of the Moulavee of the court who is a trustworthy, upright and conscientious man, proof against a bribe). A person is sent out to measure the lands; he is generally convinced by the more weighty arguments of the landholders of the justice of the claim and on the report made by the surveyor a decree is given in favour of the plaintiff—this if the ryot is able to defend the suit. If, on the contrary, he is prevented by poverty or other causes from pleading and allows judgement to go by default the issue is the same. An appeal to the judge is filed if possible and it is three years before it can be heard and determined and in the meantime recourse is had to every species of oppression. The tenants' crops are attached while on the ground, his implements of husbandry are seized, illegal imposts are demanded and taken by force and at last the ryot tired out by the tyranny of his landlord is compelled to give in and comply with his demands. . . . The laws which protect the ryot appear likely to prevent oppression on the part of the landlord yet not a day passes without every one of the rules being broken. . . . It is a common occurrence for the landholder to issue a notification that demands rent double perhaps to what the land will bear from a tenant whom he wishes to annoy. This notification, if the rent specified is according to the pargana rates, is sufficient to authorize the landholder to substitute a summary suit under VIII—1794 and V—1812 against a ryot for the whole amount of balance of the same, but as there were no regular pargana rates in his district in order to prevent the abuse of his power a suit in court to determine the equitable proportion of revenue to be declared from the value of the produce of the land is indispensably necessary before the landholder is entitled to the amount required in such notification, which if legally made, does away the necessity of engagement on the part of the tenant if he cultivates after it is affixed to his dwelling. The collector to whom causes of this nature are referred for a report under Reg. V of 1812 invariably decides to the full amount of the proclamation and the court is always obliged to reverse his decision". Thus did law operate. What was true of Burdwan in 1814 was more or less true of other districts as well. It was said that during the progress of British conquest in the North West Province the inhabitants were observed to be flying in considerable numbers. "Is Lord Lake coming", was the enquiry. "No, the Adalat is coming which is worse".

The judges on whom the administration depended so much for the rectification of abuses were all Englishmen, who were placed in three city and twenty-three Zilla Courts. Below them there were Registrars who were Englishmen, who could decide cases upto Rs. 200/-. The Native Commissioners could decide cases upto Rs. 50/-. From the city and zilla courts there could be appeal to the four Provincial Courts of Appeal at Calcutta, Patna, Dacca and Murshidabad without limit of amount. The Sadar Diwani Adalat consisted of the Governor-General and



members of the Supreme Council and there could be an appeal to it where the value exceeded one thousand rupees. There could be a further appeal to the King in Council if the amount exceeded £5,000. This was a system of justice suitable to a rich trading community.

For criminal justice the judges of City and Zilla Courts were magistrates with power to apprehend criminals. They could punish minor offences. They were otherwise to commit for trial to the next session of the Court of Circuit, four in number. Final approval of sentences of death or imprisonment for life was required from the Sadar Nizamat Adalat over which the Governor-General presided. He was aided by the Chief Qazi and Muftis. In 1801 Government relinquished jurisdiction over Sadar Diwani Adalat and Sadar Nizamat Adalat. The Sadar Court was to consist of a chief Judge, a member of Council, not the Governor-General or the Commander-in-Chief. There were to be two puisne judges who were to be selected from among the Company's covenanted servants. A third judge was added in 1805. There were authorized 'native' pleaders in the Zilla or City courts as also in the Sadar Diwani and Nizamat Adalats. Europeanization of the judicial service was for some years complete under the system of Cornwallis. The official Indian agency consisted only of native commissioners acting as referees, arbitrators, munsiffs and sadar amins or head native commissioners. The native commissioners who acted as referees or arbitrators were selected from small landed proprietors, *tahsildars*, managers of zamindari properties, merchants, traders and such other persons. Munsiffs and pargana qazis were given preference. The native commissioners were given temporary commissions. In 1814 munsiffs were permitted to try causes upto Rs. 64/-. In 1821 munsiffs' authority was raised from Rs. 64 to Rs. 150/-. European covenanted servants in the Presidency of Fort William numbered 370 in 1823 of whom only 131 were employed in judicial business. In the days of Bentinck there was a total of 416 European covenanted servants. Their salary amounted to 90 lakhs.

Bentinck was responsible for more extended use of Indian agency. In 1831 the Registrar's office was abolished as also the Provincial Courts of Appeal. Indian judicial officers were entrusted with greater responsibility. Munsiffs were empowered to try suits upto Rs. 300/-. Sadar Amins could now try suits upto Rs. 1,000/-. Principal Sadar Amins could try cases from Rs. 1,000/- to Rs. 5,000/-. Zilla and district judges were given unlimited jurisdiction in the districts. There could be an appeal from their decision to the Sadar Diwani Adalat. The European judges were to regulate the conduct of munsiffs and sadar amins. Munsiffs were for the first time to be paid a salary of Rs. 100/- per month including the expenses of their establishment. They were so long dependent upon fees which had amounted on an average to Rs. 32/- a month. The average income of munsiffs in Patna was 21 rupees per month.<sup>58</sup> Sadar amins were to be paid Rs. 250/- per month and principal sadar amins Rs. 500/-. This salary included establishment and contingencies. Thus was subordi-



nate judicial service thrown open to Indians and in subordinate judicial service integrity was sought to be ensured.

The judicial authority of the Collectors in summary and rent suits which they had enjoyed before 1793 was to be restored with power of revision on a regular suit by the zilla and city judges. Magisterial authority was transferred from the judges to the Collectors in many of the districts. By the year 1833 the Collector became the hinge of British Indian administration with a large measure of initiative. He was now a fiscal officer, charged with the collection of revenue from land and other sources, a revenue and criminal judge. "He should be a lawyer, an accountant, a financier and ready writer of state papers—a position of great and exceptional importance" (W. W. Hunter). Cornwallis' Courts with their technicalities of procedure "were calculated not only to defeat justice but to obstruct the access to it by needless delay and expenses".<sup>59</sup> Premature and ill-conceived measures prolonged many evils. The establishment was totally inadequate. The attempt to administer justice except in very trifling cases wholly by European agency was bound to break down. Between the horizon of the villager and the magistrate there was an unknown country where one of the many perils was that of the tout or quack lawyer and process peons with their powers of annoyance. Ultimately justice not in the first instance only but also in many appellate cases was entrusted to Indians. This large scale employment of uncovenanted and 'native' agency was begun in 1831.

Another problem was not, however, faced—the low salary scale of the subordinate 'native' functionary in the police, land-revenue, customs, salt and opium departments and in the clerical establishments of law courts. "Corruption was the necessary fruit of a totally inadequate salary combined with excessive temptation" (*Observations upon the Transit and Town Duties of the Bengal Presidency, 1835*). The only solution of this problem was the payment of fair remuneration and dismissal for dishonest or oppressive conduct. A Daroga got Rs. 25/- to Rs. 30/- a month. He was in charge of rural police in his locality and he was expected to displace the zamindar from his position of responsibility for policing the countryside. In the salt department the highest paid native functionary was the Diwan of the Tamluk agent. He drew a salary of Rs. 50/- a month. A Daroga at the chokis got Rs. 30/-, a sezawal Rs. 13/-, a cash keeper Rs. 12/-, a Kothi Mohrar Rs. 5/- a bearer Rs. 2/8/-.<sup>60</sup> This was the scale of salary of sheristadar in the law court and his subordinates. Such an establishment of servants with low wages was ill calculated to create a revolution in the sentiments and habits of the people. The unwillingness of the rulers to learn the language of the ruled contributed further to this increase of corruption. No attempt was made to place 'the natives in some degree beyond temptation by making the official allowances adequate to the support of their station in society. An attempt was only made to restrain corruption so far as to prevent any injury to the interest of the government'.

The filtration theory might work in the field of education—it is doubt-



ful whether it did—but it does not work in administration. Honesty cannot percolate downwards. The Indian munsiffs, sadar amins, as also deputy collectors, first appointed in 1837 and Deputy Magistrates, first appointed in 1843, were given salaries that were not perhaps inadequate and they created a tradition of honesty in subordinate judicial and executive branches of administration. But corruption could not be removed from the lowest rungs of the ladder.

In the existing circumstances British snobbery was perhaps inevitable. The Company's covenanted servants began their career after two years of training at Haileybury College near London. They also attended for a few months the language school at Fort William. The excellent spirit of comradeship at Haileybury was carried down to India where this special caste claimed identity with the state. As a member of the Company's covenanted service put it: "The young Englishman found that those situations only of which the income was so small that no Englishman would live on it was filled by the natives. They would suppose that there was some truth in what they had heard about the incapacity and roguery of the people and from considering them as a degraded race it was but a step to treat them as such". The Indian milieu of authority and submission, luxury and flattery did the rest. Sleeman deplored in 1843 that "there was no longer that sympathy between the people and the agents of the government that the European officer did not show that courtesy towards the middle and higher classes and that kindness towards the humbler which used to characterise them. The native officer imitated or took advantage of the conduct.

The state of things is thus described by a writer in 1834 :

"There is an aristocracy of birth  
In England and a second one of riches,  
A third perhaps, of talent, wit or worth,  
All are intolerant, and 'it's doubtful which is  
Most so, but all are mastered ; one, on earth  
And only one, quite out of the human reach is—  
And thats the aristocracy of skin—  
Where the white rule, black never can squeeze in.

(*The Baboo and other Tales by Augustus Princep*)

But in the history of British connection with India during these years we can trace many strands of character and motive. The "consecrated cobbler" who came to India in 1793 in defiance of the East India Company's ban started his great work at Serampore. He stands in a class by himself as one of the most potent influences in the moral and intellectual advancement of India. Carey, Marshman and Ward exerted the greatest influence on Indian society and administration. In the year 1831, in the address presented to David Hare by 565 young Indians in February 1831 he was described as setting an "example to his own countrymen and ours to admire which is fame and to imitate immor-



talities". The impetuous regime of Bentinck, Macaulay and Trevelyan created an expectation that the contact with the expanding energy of western life would result in surrender, the uprooting of Indian civilization. But "the Indian past is no blank page. It is rather like an illuminated manuscript, partly worn away and needing revision, but still most precious for the subject matter it contains".<sup>61</sup> The worst of the anglicizing days was soon over. Ram Mohan Ray stands as the embodiment of India's response to this western challenge. On evangelization Bishop Heber wrote in one of his letters, "Do we encounter no opposition? Unfortunately we do. An apostate Brahmin Ram Mohan Ray who was once half christian but now wants to found a sect of his own has written some mischievous pamphlets against us."<sup>62</sup> Indians were startled by the strength of the west but there was no advance of the church in India.

Social reform awakened interest in Indian mind. There was a re-reading of orthodoxy, a re-discovery of essentials. Intellectual hinduism was pitted against Brahmanical prejudice. There is a fascination about hindu rites and ceremonies which the oriental mind finds it almost impossible to resist. But protest against the bondage of medieval religion, social and sacerdotal laws and institutions became very active. Attention has been focussed very naturally upon Sati, infanticide and Kulin polygamy. As Tagore said in another context, "What you feel as the truth of a people has its numberless contradictions just as the single fact of the roundness of the earth is contradicted by the innumerable facts of its hills and hollows". Kulin polygamy was an abuse confined to a very small group of people, not even one in one thousand. It has been described in a way which makes it appear to be true of the whole country. It began to die out when the modern organisation of information drew the attention of the society to this evil. Ward has given an exaggerated picture of infanticide in his *View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindus*. Public sentiment was opposed to it and Wellesley had no difficulty in putting an end to it.

The origin of Sati "will most probably be found in the voluntary sacrifice of the widow inconsolable for the loss of her husband.....interest now began to whisper to her husband's relations that the widow had a right to exclude them from his property during her life but that she might be persuaded to accompany him.....Foolish enthusiasm of feeble minds did the rest". The Pandit of the Supreme Court said, 'few instances are to be met with in the Pooranas and other authorities of the eminently virtuous women of former ages sacrificing themselves either by Sahamaram or anumaram. But the practice is frequent among modern women. The act of dying is not enjoined'. Calcutta and its neighbouring districts stank to high heaven with their iniquities. In the official list of Satis from 1815 to 1818 we notice some very significant features—in 1815 there were 253 Satis in the Calcutta division, 31 in Dacca, 11 in Murshidabad. In 1817 there were 442 in the Calcutta division, 58 in Dacca and 30 in Murshi-





dabad. Between 1815 and 1828, 63 p.c. of Sati was in the Calcutta division alone.<sup>63</sup> In 1825 the number was 398 in the Calcutta division, 101 in Dacca, 21 in Murshidabad, in 1826, 324 in Calcutta, 65 in Dacca, 8 in Murshidabad, in 1827, 337 in Calcutta, 49 in Dacca, 2 in Murshidabad.

The Dayabhaga law of succession which prevailed in Bengal ensured to the widow the right to the deceased husband's property during her life time. This was perhaps to some extent responsible for this growing iniquity. One is reminded of the circumstances in Maharashtra which led to pressure being put on Sakwar Bai on the death of Raja Sahu in 1749. The Peshwa feared that she might embroil the Maratha nation in a civil war and therefore insisted on her becoming a Sati as a childless widow. Grant Duff refers to the 'calm villainy of a Brahmin Court'. Villainy was also here at work. It would not be wrong if we assert that a social abuse under the cloak of religion proved to be very useful to the heirs of the deceased. Marshman told Bishop Heber in 1824, "These horrors are of more frequent occurrence within these few last years than when he first knew Bengal.....an increase which he imputes to the increasing luxury of the higher and middling classes and to their expensive imitation of European habits which make many families ready and anxious to get rid, by any means, of the necessity of supporting their mothers or the widows of their relatives."<sup>64</sup> Indians learnt at first in the law courts—Mayor's Court, Supreme Court, Diwani and Nizamat Courts, Sadar Diwani and Sadar Nizamat Courts—"the low arts of chicanery, imposture and litigiousness.....they did not imbibe any elements of European character. Only the mildness and simplicity of their own character were undermined." "New professions of informers, sharpers, intriguers, suborners and false witnesses came into existence". All this would explain why the abuse increased to such an extent in Calcutta and the surrounding areas during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The attempts of the government to regulate this practice only increased it. It was felt that the 'sanction of the ruling power is added to the recommendation of the Sastras'.

Ram Mohan Ray began his campaign against this abuse by trying earnestly to persuade the widows not to commit suicide. But 'foolish enthusiasm of feeble minds' could not be checked in that way. He was not successful. Superstition and corruption were both at work. He took recourse to abstract arguments of a purely hindu nature in some of the tracts which he wrote. According to him Sati owed its existence to "jealousy and selfishness acting under the cloak of religion but in defiance of the most sacred authorities". In this way he took the leadership of the movement against the burning of hindu widows. He submitted his views to Lord William Bentinck in a written form though he was not in favour of taking any official drastic step. Bentinck took courage in both hands and decreed the abolition of Sati (4th December, 1829 Reg. XVII).



### CHARTER ACT OF 1833.

With the Charter Act of 1833 we pass from the Bengal of Cornwallis to the India of Bentinck. The Charter Act of 1833 has been described as the *Charter of laissez faire*. The Company was to close its commercial business with all convenient speed after 22nd April, 1834. The Company was not exporting goods from Europe to India since 1825 and it was not importing goods from India excepting raw silk, some manufactured silk, saltpetre and indigo. Most of the Company's aurungs had been already closed. It was now lawful for any "natural-born subject of His Majesty to proceed by sea to the Company's possessions, to reside therein, to acquire and hold lands or to make profits out of such residence without licence". Thus began the period of Chartered laissez faire in the eastern seas. The Despatch on the Charter Act explained the clauses 81-86 relating to the free entry of "all natural born subjects of His Majesty" "your laws and regulations and also all your executive proceedings in relation to the whole be framed on a principle not of restriction but of encouragement . . . the regulations which you shall make with the just and humane designs of protecting the native from ill treatment must not be such as to harass the European with any unnecessary restraints or give him uneasiness by the display of improper distrust and suspicion . . . care above all things must be taken not to make casual misconduct the occasion of harsh legislation . . . such natural born subjects of His Majesty . . . as are authorized to reside in the country are also authorized to hold lands for any term of years in the places in which they are so authorized to reside . . . it will be one amidst the many duties of the Law Commissioners to review the modes and forms of Indian coveyancing with a view to give facility to the transfer and mobility to the possession of real property. . . . The Act assumes that the British capitalist comes as a friend, not as an enemy, and the policy of the Act should be defeated if the designs of such persons were to meet with any unnecessary hindrance or embarrassment. The regulations of 1824 and 1828 impeded and discouraged those investments in land which they were on the contrary intended to aid and facilitate". The plantation system was to make a good start. British capital investment in indigo, coffee and tea could now be secure. It has been pointed out that this was the origin of the law of registration which helped the alienation of peasant holdings.

Clause 87 of the Charter Act runs as follows: "And be it enacted that no native of the said territories, nor any natural born subject of his Majesty resident therein, shall by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them, be disabled from holding any place, office or employment under the said Company".

Indian public opinion, as it became articulate, demanded its implementation, regarded it as a fundamental principle, more or less in the same manner as the English people came to regard clauses 12, 14 and 39 of the Magna Carta as the basis of its constitutional life. This section was



intended to throw high offices open to Indians. In his speech on the charter Macaulay described it as a 'wise, benevolent and noble clause'. When he spoke on the charter he was the Secretary of the Board of Control. He was warmly praised by Charles Grant Junior, who as President of the Board of Control was in charge of the bill, on the government's behalf.<sup>65</sup> Dodwell writes, "This section has usually been considered as intended immediately to open the higher offices to Indians but that was certainly not the case. By an act passed in 1793 the appointment to any civil post in the Company's territories carrying a salary of over £800 a year had been confined to covenanted servants of the East India Company. No Indian had ever been nominated to that service and the Act of 1833 did nothing to modify the force of former statutes. No change was in fact intended in the recruitment to the higher posts which were to be continued to be filled with Englishmen".<sup>66</sup> According to the Despatch on the Charter Act Indians were not to be excluded from employments in subordinate posts which were not to be engrossed by men of mixed blood who were becoming numerous. "The distinction between situations allotted to the covenanted service and all other situations of an official or public nature will remain generally as at present". The Despatch on the Charter Act virtually nullified clause 87. The aim of government in the words of the despatch was thus defined: "It is not by holding out incentives to official ambition but by repressing crime, by securing and guarding property, by creating confidence, by ensuring to industry the fruit of its labour, by protecting men in the undisturbed enjoyment of their rights and in the unfettered exercise of their faculties that governments best minister to the public wealth and happiness" (paragraph 109). Macaulay's peroration—"The public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system" was intended by James Mill and his followers to become tall talk. The Charter inaugurated a new era in words. It was said, "we never break our promises nor do we fulfil them". The exclusive system of European agency had rendered government inefficient. Administrative necessity led to the creation of subordinate posts to be filled by Indians. But the continuance of Indian national inferiority remained a cardinal maxim of British policy. James Mill had said before a House of Commons Committee in 1831 (28th August) "Let them grow rich as cultivators, merchants and manufacturers and not accustom themselves to look for wealth and dignity to successful intriguing for places under the government". William Thackeray (quoted by Digby) best sums up the attitude: "We do not want generals, statesmen and legislators. We want industrious husbandmen". This arrogant policy became a great irritant. The Duke of Wellington is reported to have remarked: "With respect to the clause declaring the natives to be eligible to all situations. . . Why was the declaration made in the face of a regulation preventing its being carried into effect? It was a mere deception".<sup>67</sup> British credit for good faith was severely shaken. The sedulous diffusion of liberal doctrines only made the 'large promises and smooth excuses' look all the more ridi-



culous. Ecstatic admiration of themselves and their doings by the members of the civil service very soon ceased to inspire enthusiasm. The Charter Act of 1833 proved, as the Queen's Proclamations also proved later, that equality had no legal validity.

### BENGAL IN 1833-34.

In the decade 1830-40 Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Ramtanu Lahiri, Rajnarain Bose began their English education. In the list of prize winners of the Sanskrit College for 1839 we find the name of Iswar Chandra (Vidyasagar). It has been said by R. C. Dutt that Raja Ram Mohan Roy represented the earnest work of the first generation of his countrymen in the 19th century ; Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar represented the arduous endeavours of the second. He and his associates—Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Ramgopal Ghose, Harish Chandra Mukherjee, Kisto Das Pal, Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, Madhusudhan Dutta, Digambar Mitra, Rajendralal Mitra, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyaya, Ramtanu Lahiri formed a galaxy of really great men "whose open mind received and assimilated all that was healthy and life-giving outside the range of Indian thought". The public mind expanded and those who wrote the commentary on the Charter Act of 1833—James Mill and his followers—did not know how best governments could respond to the demands of the people. British superintendence and Indian agency as an administrative policy became very soon an anachronism. A deficiency in self respect was perhaps a defect of the oriental character and western education encouraged a growth of independence. Necessary consequences followed not long after.

The awakening of the Bengali mind is best described in the words of Bankim Chandra—"The Bengali had lost his manliness but not his acuteness. From Kulluka Bhatta to Jagannath volume after volume and commentary after commentary were written to interpret and expand and alter and mystify a system of law which already in the hands of its original framers had gone beyond the proper limits of legislative interference and set unbearable restraints on individual freedom of action. And this unlimited expansion and development of an already ponderous system of law or rather of law and religion under which the Bengali already groaned until all his pleasures and his aspirations became restricted to his *hookah* and his love songs. The splendid *nyaya* philosophy which flourished side by side with it and to have matured and developed which constitutes the sole claim of Bengal to intellectual pre-eminence in any department over other provinces of India had little influence on the people. The inherent rationalism of this philosophy remained a secret with its exclusive professors. What a blow to the immense mass of Bengali superstition would that philosophy have been if it had been allowed to see the day. But the only effect which it had on the destinies of the people was the importation of



its subtleties into the endless mazes of Hindu law and its endowment with a borrowed strength which it never could have commanded of itself.

And so the Bengali stood crushed and spiritless, insensible to his own wrongs till a new light dawned on him, to rouse him from his state of lethargy and with this new dawn came into the country one of the mightiest instruments of civilization, the printing press".<sup>68</sup> Indian students rushed to the institutions of New Learning "with the fervour and excitement of the Renaissance when the new learning flashed in the scholastic darkness of medieval Europe".

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## **SECTION 2**



## ADMINISTRATION (1833-1905)

The Government of India Act, 1833 (3 and 4 W.c.85) made a definite change in the organisation of government in the East India Company's territories in this country. Up till that time there was no separate Government of India. The Governor-General in Council of Bengal was responsible not only for the governance of the Presidency of that name but also for the discharge of those all-India obligations which were assigned to him. The Bengal Presidency was, of course, not confined to Bengal proper. Its authority extended over Bihar, Orissa, and also over those North-western territories which had been absorbed in the East India Company's dominions. Latterly it extended over Assam as well.

This arrangement was changed by the Act of 1833 under which the Governor-General in Council of Bengal became the Governor-General in Council of India. But the administration of the Bengal Presidency was not thereby fully dissociated from the Government of India's organisation. The Governor-General of India became ex-officio the Governor of Bengal. It was provided that in running the government of this Presidency he would have associated with him a council just as the Governors of Madras and Bombay had with them. But evidently the appointment of a separate Council was not compulsory and actually no such separate Council was ever constituted. The Governor-General of India remained responsible for the conduct of the government of Bengal with its far-flung territories. In view of the fact that the Governor-General had to be frequently absent from Calcutta and remain in other parts of the country, Section 69 of the Act of 1833 provided for the appointment of an ordinary member of the Governor-General's Council as Deputy-Governor. Actually it became the practice to appoint the senior member of the Council in this capacity. It is, however, not to be understood that the Deputy-Governor was given full responsibility in regard to the administration of Bengal. The responsibility in fact remained attached to the Governor (who was the Governor-General of India) and the Deputy Governor acted on his behalf. His title really signified the extent of his responsibility.

It should be known that the ordinary members of the Governor-General's Council were not then in charge of different portfolios. They were not required to run any department of the Government of India. They were required only to offer their opinions and observations, both oral and written, on those important matters which had to be referred to the Council. This gave these members some leisure and the senior member who was Deputy Governor could devote this leisure to the governance of Bengal. Even then it was well known that the charge was too heavy. It was besides not thought proper that all the territories huddled together in the Presidency of Bengal should be governed from one centre. Those were not days of linguistic emphasis. Administrative convenience



was the one principle adopted in carving out provinces. In any event in 1836 the North-Western territories comprising a considerable part of present Uttar Pradesh were constituted into a separate province under a Lieutenant-Governor. This was done under an Act of Parliament passed in the previous year. This lightened the burden which Bengal Government happened to bear. Even then the province remained unwieldy.

It should be emphasised that when the Government of the Bengal Presidency was separated from the Government of India, separation was for a number of years rather theoretical. Not only the Governor-General of India was ex-officio Governor of Bengal and a senior member of his Council acted on his behalf in his absence but the secretariat was common. No separate establishment for the Bengal Government was created until 1843. In that year a separate secretariat consisting of one Secretary, two Under-Secretaries and requisite ministerial staff was set up for the running of Bengal administration.

The arrangements made in 1833, 1836 and 1843 worked till 1854. But the experiment of treating the vast area still included in the Bengal Presidency proper as the 'home province' to be governed by the Governor-General of India in his capacity as Governor of Bengal resulted in the deterioration of efficiency in administration. Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General from 1848 to 1856, felt the deficiency of the system and recommended to the authorities in London that a separate executive charge should be created for Bengal. The British Government became convinced as to its necessity and accordingly in the Act of 1853 provision was made for the appointment of a separate Governor for Bengal. The Governor-General would no longer be the Governor of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal. Nor would he be entitled to appoint a Deputy Governor. But the Statute of 1853 made it possible for the Governor-General in Council to appoint a Lieutenant-Governor for Bengal if the authorities in London decided to keep the Governorship in abeyance. Actually the Court of Directors decided that for the time being no Governor would be appointed and authorised the Governor-General in Council to appoint a Lieutenant-Governor who would run the administration of Bengal in full responsibility to the Government of India. So what had been done for one part of the Bengal Presidency in 1836 was repeated for the rest of the area in 1854. The first Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal was Sir Frederick Halliday. He had joined the Covenanted Civil Service in 1824 at the age of eighteen and was adjudged now as the ablest civilian in the Company's service. He climbed the ladder in the usual way from rung to rung until a few months before his final promotion as Lieutenant-Governor he became an ordinary member of the Governor-General's Council. The practice of appointing a Lieutenant-Governor for what were called "the Lower Provinces of Bengal," thus started (in 1854) continued throughout the period of our survey.

The administration which was built up in Bengal and for the matter of that in the rest of British India had one chief objective behind it. It



was to consolidate and make permanent British supremacy in the country. To this end it had the ancillary objectives of properly organising and maintaining law and order in the province and of properly organising and running the machinery for the assessment and collection of land revenue which was the mainstay of the Government. The administrative machinery reared for the purpose had in the nature of things to be bureaucratic. An administrative hierarchy had to be set up, the officers placed on one rung in the ladder being responsible to those on the higher rung, the ultimate control in the province being centred in the Lieutenant-Governor and he in his turn being accountable to the Governor-General in Council.

The administrative structure and functions of officers were largely based on Indian tradition, particularly active since the days of Akbar, and partly attuned to the new needs of the East India Company and its successor, the British Crown. Ideology did not play much part in the initial build-up. Experiments were indeed made, abandoned and made again for nearly eighty years since Warren Hastings' time. But except at the later stages of the period ideology was not behind these experiments. They were made and abandoned on practical grounds. Later, things changed, though slightly. In 1836 Lord Auckland in his capacity as Governor of Bengal appointed a Committee with W. W. Bird as Chairman and with Frederick Halliday, later the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, as one of the members, to make recommendations for the better organisation of the police in this province. Frederick Halliday in a note which was supported by the Chairman and another member but rejected by the majority expressed the view that judicial and police powers should not be combined in the same hands. "The union of Magistrate with Collector has been stigmatised as incompatible but the junction of thief-catcher with judge is surely more anomalous in theory and more mischievous in practice". This attempt to infuse a political theory, well-established in the United States of America and partly in the United Kingdom, proved abortive. But the theories enunciated, one in 1853 and the other in 1871, tallied with the exigencies of British administration in India and became largely articles of faith with the British authorities during the rest of our period.

In a letter on the problems of district administration written by Sir Cecil Beadon, then Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Government of India, he enunciated on behalf of the Governor what might be called the oriental theory of government which alone was in his view applicable to the administrative organisation of the province. "It seems to his Lordship that the true theory of Indian government is the entire subjection of every Civil Officer in a division to the Commissioner at the head of it and the entire subjection of every executive officer in a district to its executive chief. Even as regards judicial officers, his Lordship is inclined to think that a great advantage is gained by placing them in all matters of an executive nature directly under the Commissioner." Unity of authority and not separation of powers should be the keynote to Indian



administrative organisation. Nearly eighteen years later, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, who had succeeded Sir Henry Summer Maine as the Law Member of the Governor-General's Council, recorded in 1871 a Minute which was published as No. 89 of the Selections from the records of the Home Department of the Government of India. In this Minute he observes: "It seems to me that the first principle which must be borne in mind is that the maintenance of the position of the District Officers is absolutely essential to the maintenance of British rule in India and that any diminution in their influence and authority over the Natives would be dearly purchased even by an improvement in the administration of justice." Criminal jurisdiction "is both in theory and fact the most distinctive and generally recognised mark of sovereign power. All the world over, the man who can punish is the ruler." In view of this there was no point in going the whole hog in separation of executive and judicial powers and denuding the District magistrates of criminal jurisdiction. Unity of authority was here also the key-note.

The theories referred to above were enunited, as we have seen, only during the middle years of British rule in India. Long before that, it may be repeated, the administrative organisation was built up by processes of trial and error. But it may be emphasised that the objectives were to perpetuate British rule in India and to that end to limit administration to few essential functions and run it in that circumscribed sphere with skill and efficiency. As again the functions of government were just to maintain law and order, administer justice and collect land revenue, the emphasis had to be put mainly on district administration and not too much on the secretariat at headquarters. The provincial secretariat remained in fact a very small establishment not only before our period but throughout the period under review. We have seen above that when the separate Bengal secretariat was constituted in 1843 it was manned by one Secretary and two Under-Secretaries. It was only during the Lieutenant-Governorship of Sir William Grey (1867-71) that another Secretary was added. It was proposed then that one of the Senior Secretaries should be of the same status with the same emoluments as the Chief Secretaries of Madras and Bombay. But the proposal was not accepted. In any event there was augmentation in the strength of the Secretariat. In 1870-71 again there was financial devolution and as a result of that the responsibility of the provincial government increased and the burden on the secretariat became greater. It was not, however, till Sir Ashley Eden became Lieutenant-Governor (1877-82) that another Secretary was added but this was combined with some reduction in junior staff. The three Secretaries were respectively in charge of Judicial, Revenue and Financial branches of the secretariat. It was not till later that one of the Secretaries was given pre-eminence as Chief Secretary.

Stress had inevitably to be put on district administration. In a despotic governmental organisation there was little scope for local self-government. Only long after British administration had been put on





a sound stable footing that ideas about local bodies exercising control over some local affairs acquired currency. Even then elaborate arrangements were made for controlling their activities through local officers of the Government. In view of this a local hierarchical official organisation had to be set up. In the early period of British rule there was at first some fumbling about the administrative units on the basis of which this hierarchical organisation was to be built. But soon the traditional unit of the district was seized upon and made the local basis of administration. This did not mean that the territorial limits of the districts were the same as in earlier ages. They had actually differed from time to time. But a fairly big area was included in every district, though the extent of the area was not the same in any two cases. Four years before our period would start, the Government decided to carve out a higher additional unit which came to be called a division. This was brought into being under Regulation 1 of 1829 and the division came to consist of a number of districts, the number varying in each case. The objective was at first to facilitate both the administration of criminal justice and revenue. As a matter of fact the division became an agency of supervision over the work of the districts. Those were days when the province was far-flung and communications were difficult. It was an impossible task to exercise this supervision from headquarters of the province in an effective manner. So this intermediate link was created.

Just as a unit higher than the district had to be carved out for better supervision of work, so a unit lower than the district had soon to be thought of. It is not exactly clear from the information available to us at present as to the exact time of the creation of the subdivisinal system in Bengal. Although by a Regulation of 1833 (Regulation IX of that year) the posts of Deputy Collectors were created, it was not till ten years later (1843) that posts of Deputy Magistrates were established. It is very likely that about that time the lower unit of a subdivision with a residential officer with magisterial powers was brought into being. The first sub-division was Khulna which was then in the district of Jessore. The fact was that law and order could not be effectively maintained from district headquarters. Particularly when some refractory elements were present in some outlying areas it became well nigh impossible for police officers of lower ranks to cope with the situation and it was thought necessary that there should be some officer with higher authority near by. It was in this need that the sub-divisional system as it has worked in Bengal since then originated. But it was not all at once that every district was parcelled out into the requisite number of subdivisions. By 1856 when Sir Frederick Halliday was Lieutenant-Governor, there were only thirty-three sub-divisions in the province which included not only Bengal but Bihar, Orissa and Assam. So some new sub-divisions were a desideratum. In the time of Sir John Peter Grant (Lieutenant-Governor from 1859 to 1862) there was a great extension of the system and in the time of Sir Cecil Beadon, his successor, there was a further creation of



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subdivisions. By the time we reach the end of our period the subdivisional system was extended to every district, though there was at least one district in Bengal which was too small to require any outlying subdivision.

At the beginning of our period there were two superior officers posted in every district. One was known as the Collector and was entrusted not only with the responsibility of assessing and collecting revenue but also with the important duties of maintaining law and order in the district and administering lower criminal justice. The other officer was called the District Judge who had not only to administer civil justice but also to try sessions cases. This arrangement had been arrived at after a good deal of experiment during the previous period. It may be pointed out in passing that after the creation of the new unit of division, it was placed in charge of a Commissioner whose full title was Commissioner of Revenue and Circuit. As Commissioner of Circuit he was to try sessions cases. But as our period starts the trial of sessions cases was entrusted to the District Judges. The Collector became in fact the chief executive officer of the district, working under the supervision and control of the Commissioner of a division both in respect of the collection of revenue and in respect of the maintenance of peace and order in his area. Police was rather haphazardly organised and was a direct charge of the Collector.

It was felt by many that the District Officers (Collectors) were overburdened with work. They had too many duties to perform and too many responsibilities to bear. And though the arrangement made for simplicity and economy, it might not result in the desired efficiency. In a previous section of this paper reference has been made to the Committee which was set up in 1836 by Lord Auckland as Governor of Bengal under the chairmanship of W. W. Bird. Three of the members of this Committee, particularly Frederick Halliday, put stress on the incongruity of combining in the District Officer the functions of the police and magistrate. He wanted criminal judicial functions to be withdrawn from the officer responsible for the maintenance of peace and order in the district. He further suggested the organisation of the police force on new lines. But the majority of the members did not think it expedient to separate the administration of lower criminal justice from the officer responsible for the maintenance of law and order. They recommended that instead of two superior officers in a district there should henceforward be three officers—the District Magistrate, the District Judge and the Collector. This recommendation was accepted and gradually acted upto. By 1845 except in three districts, administration came to be organised on this basis. But as the new experiment came to be made, criticism began to thicken. It was found that the Collectors who were senior officers could take time easy, the District Magistrates who were junior officers had to bear the main burden of administration. The number of Covenanted Civilians who were to fill these posts was also limited and distribution



of work between three officers instead of two put a strain on the limited reservoir. Meanwhile, as we have seen, Cecil Beadon enunciated, on behalf of the Government of Bengal, the oriental theory of government according to which all threads of administration should be held by one officer. Unity of command was to be the motto. All factors in fact conspired to make the experiment temporary. By 1859 the arrangement was reversed and the system which had been in vogue before 1839 was reverted to. In other words there would be again only two superior officers in the district (i) the District Magistrate and Collector and (ii) the District Judge. This arrangement continued throughout the rest of our period.

The principle of filling up the civil posts under Company's Government was for nearly thirty years of our period what had been laid down in the Act of 1793 (33 Geo. 3, c. 52). All the offices under the Company in the establishment of each of the three Presidencies were to be filled by Covenanted Civilians according to seniority. Under this arrangement which was created at the instance of Cornwallis, not only positions of trust and responsibility but virtually every post were reserved for members of this Service which was a close European preserve. But deviations had to be made in practice from the law. To fill every office by a Covenanted Civilian would have been an impossible financial proposition. So not only minor routine work was entrusted to other people but both on the ground of economy and on the consideration of Indian interests some posts of lower responsibility had also to be filled otherwise than prescribed. In 1824, for instance, the posts of Munsifs and Sadar Amins were created under instructions of the Court of Directors and they were meant to be filled by Indians. In 1831 the posts of Principal Sadar Amins were also brought into being. This was intended to kill two birds with one stone. This would make possible the running of judicial administration with economy and at the same time it would be a sop to the ambition of the rising educated class in the country. By 1868 not only the scales of salary of these judicial officers were improved but the designation of Sadar Amin and Principal Sadar Amins was changed to Subordinate Judge.

On the side of judicial administration the need of uncovenanted officers was felt earlier than on the executive side. Besides, Indian talent was to be more encouraged for judicial work than in executive administration. Accordingly, as we have seen, the appointment of uncovenanted judicial officers (predominantly, if not wholly, Indian) preceded the recruitment of uncovenanted executive officers. We have already mentioned it that it was not till 1833 that a Regulation was passed for the appointment of Deputy Collectors and it was not till 1843 that they could be invested with magisterial powers. But it should be emphasised that all these appointments could be interpreted as inconsistent with the provisions of the Act of 1793 and as such unlawful. But necessity knew no law. Appointments were continued. It was only in 1861 that an Act (24 & 25 Vic., cap 54) was passed by Parliament superseding the



provisions of the Act of 1793. It reserved practically all superior appointments, judicial or executive, for members of the Covenanted Service while the other posts were left to members of the uncovenanted Service. If any superior charge ordinarily reserved for members of the Covenanted Service was to be given to an uncovenanted officer this could be done only with the consent of the Secretary of State for India. Even when the Indian Police was reorganised under Act V of 1861, the post of Chief of Police would be given only to a member of the Covenanted Civil Service, the other superior posts in the I.P. being, however, given to members of the All-India Police Service. It was because of this peculiar position of the Covenanted Service (called Indian Civil Service since the nineties of the last century) that this service was later described by H. A. L. Fisher as the government of the country. It was not merely an arm, an instrument, of the government but the government itself.

It has been mentioned already that as a member of the Bird Committee of 1836 Frederick Halliday had suggested the organisation of the police of Bengal on a new comprehensive basis. No heed was given to what he said then. But in the course of the next twenty-five years police administration became a by-word. Crimes went undetected and law and order languished in many parts of this far-flung province. At last in 1860 a Police Commission was appointed by the Government of India and on its recommendation a new police organisation, more or less on the model of what Halliday had recommended in 1838, was set up and its higher rungs (except the highest) were to be manned by the members of the new all-India police service to be recruited in England. At the head of the police organisation in the province there would be an Inspector-General and at the head of each range (the province was divided into ranges) there would be a Deputy-Inspector General and at the head of each district there would be a Superintendent of Police. In organisational matters and in fact in all matters of internal economy the police was to be managed and controlled by its own officers. The magistracy, except at the level of the District Magistrate, would have nothing to do with the control of the police. This is why Act V of 1861 was acclaimed by some as embodying the principle of separation of judicial and executive powers. But there was really no point in making any such assertion. In the District Magistrate the two functions met and as he controlled the police wing as much as the wing of the magistracy, separation became a misnomer. Whatever might have been the intentions of the reform of 1861, the fact was that the police continued to be dominated as much by the District Magistrate and the Commissioner of a Division as it had been before. Sir George Campbell (Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal 1871-74) did not pin much faith to the principles underlying the Act of 1861 and in practice nullified them to a great extent. In his Report on the Administration of Bengal (1871-72) he made it clear that the police was not a co-ordinate branch of administration but was entirely subordinate to the District Magistrate (pp. 66-67). At the level of the Commissioner, he similar-





ly succeeded in making the Deputy Inspector-General of Police virtually his assistant. Except for the fact that the control of the District Magistrate over the police nullified the principle of judicial independence this control was, however, otherwise very salutary. The Covenanted Civilians who alone became District Magistrates and Divisional Commissioners had a better liberal education and wider outlook and could consequently take a more sensible view of things than the police officers generally.

We have described above the growth of the bureaucratic system of government in Bengal. But it is pertinent to refer to some administrative details to complete the picture of the bureaucratic hierarchy already described. The Covenanted Civilians who manned all the higher posts were at first recruited by patronage\* and sent to India without any further training. They got their training in India as they earned experience in different aspects of administration. Lord Wellesley took the decision in 1800 of establishing a full-fledged training college to be called the College of Fort William where the civil servants on their arrival in India would be required to take a comprehensive training both in liberal arts and in specialised subjects like Indian history, law and languages. This comprehensive scheme after a short experiment had to be abandoned at the instance of the Court of Directors who decided to set up a seminary at Haileybury near London where the probationers would be given education in liberal subjects for two years and after passing the prescribed examinations would come out to India and study specialised Indian subjects at Fort William. The Covenanted Civilians who governed Bengal during a large part of the century were Haileybury men. In the Act of 1833 there was indeed a provision inserted at the instance of Macaulay that henceforward for every vacancy in the Covenanted Service there would be four nominations by the Court of Directors and one fourth of the number thus nominated would be chosen by a competitive examination limited to them. But this provision was nullified by the opposition of the Court of Directors and undiluted patronage system continued for another twenty years. But during these twenty years new ideas were abroad in England as to the best way of choosing and organising the civil service. So the Charter Act of 1853 provided, in response to public opinion, for an open written competitive examination to be held in London and through this examination alone the members of the Covenanted Service would henceforward be recruited. The examination on the recommendations of a Committee presided over by Lord Macaulay would be only in liberal subjects and the standard would be that of Honours Examinations in British universities. Though details varied from time to time the principle of competitive examination came to stay and on this basis all the officers who governed Bengal during the rest of our period were recruited. This arrangement was intended to remove nepotism and in-

\* Usually the near relatives of the Directors of the East India Company were nominated. It was on this account that the Covenanted Civil Service of India was called "that sacred college of nephews."



competence and was acclaimed as democratic in the sense that entry into the Covenanted Service was now open to talent irrespective of affiliation to particular families.

The Deputy Collectors and Deputy Magistrates and the Sub-Deputy Collectors and Magistrates (the latter were recruited for the first time in the time of Sir George Campbell) were for many years appointed by patronage. But the principle of competitive examination for the recruitment of civil servants had entered into the texture of Indian political thought and there was a great demand for its introduction for the recruitment of Deputy Magistrates who were included in the general category of uncovenanted service but who later, on the acceptance of the Aitchison Commission's recommendations, came to belong to what was called the Provincial Executive Service (the Covenanted Service being called henceforward as the Indian Civil Service). With effect from 1884 these officers came to be appointed on the basis of a competitive examination in liberal subjects, limited to accepted candidates. This system prevailed for twenty years. But in 1904 Lord Curzon's Government abolished the competitive system and reverted to the old patronage system. The ostensible reason was that as graduation at a University was the minimum qualification, recruitment of the cream of the population was ensured thereby and further competition among graduates was uncalled for. But the real reason was that the Government wanted to keep the appointments more in hand than it might be possible under a competitive system.

The bureaucratic system of government was in later decades of the period diluted to some extent by what came to be called local self-government. Bureaucracy still indeed remained, 'triumphant' but some relaxation appeared on the horizon. Local bodies in rural areas were first contemplated in connection with village watch and ward. Unlike in England the regular constabulary was under the direct control of the provincial government, exercised through local officers. The lowest police unit chalked out in this regard was the thana which exercised jurisdiction over quite a good number of villages. To set up a police station in every village or even in a small group of villages would involve too high a financial burden. So a village watch and ward was to be carved out and chowkidars were to be appointed on the financial responsibility of a village or a group of villages. The chowkidars were to supply information to the thana. Accordingly a Chowkidari Act was passed in 1856 by the Governor-General's Council which alone during the period 1834 to 1861 had legislative authority. A *panchayat* was to be nominated by the District Magistrate. It was to consist of at least five members. Its duty was to assess upon the local people the rates to be realised for payment of the chowkidars who were, however, to be appointed by the District Magistrate.

I have not sufficient facts at my command to state whether the Act of 1856 was applied on any large scale. But it is a fact that this measure did not prove as effective as it might have been expected to be. What was



more, during the decade ending in 1869 there were two points of view in official circles, one being that the chowkidars should be part and parcel of the regular constabulary controlled by the Government through its own officers, the other being that the chowkidars should be under the control of the village concerned and maintained by its people. This latter point of view was not only entertained by a number of officers but also by the British Indian Association which alone could in those days ventilate Indian opinion outside the legislatures. In 1869 a committee was constituted by the Government of Bengal with Rivers Thomson (afterwards Lieutenant-Governor of this province) as the chairman. His committee recommended that village watch and ward should be controlled by a village body called the panchayat. Accordingly in 1870 Bengal Act VI (of 1870) was passed. It empowered the District Magistrate to appoint a panchayat consisting of not less than five members in any village where the number of houses was more than sixty. It was to be responsible for the maintenance of village watch and for due report of all crimes in the village to the thana. The panchayat would thus be an ad hoc body with the one function of looking after law and order. In this regard its eyes and ears would be the chowkidars who would be appointed by the panchayat but could be dismissed by it only with the approval of the District Magistrate. The chowkidari system thus introduced remained in vogue with some amendment throughout the rest of our period.

The British Government whose main functions were for long limited to the maintenance of law and order and the collection of revenue had to undertake gradually some elementary welfare functions as well. Though some attention had been paid to education since 1813, and more particularly since 1835, it was not of any adequate scale. Nor could it pay much attention to the problems of public health. Opening up of roads except where they were necessary for strategic purposes was largely neglected. Nor were the financial resources of the Government such as to cope with these duties if they were undertaken. Accordingly it was suggested by the Government of India to the Secretary of State in London that local cesses might be realised and spent for local purposes of road-making, public sanitation and education. For this, the cooperation of the local people must be enlisted both in assessing and realising cesses and in carrying out the projects. The Secretary of State in his reply emphasised that "it would be most desirable if the local character of these rates could be emphatically marked by committing both the assessing of them and the application of them to local bodies. . . ." This despatch of the Secretary of State was forwarded by the Government of India to the Bengal Government with the advice that "every opportunity should be given to the people to participate in the management of their local affairs. . . ."

The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal now appointed a committee on the recommendations of which the District Road Cess Bill was introduced in the Bengal Legislative Council in March 1871. It became an Act



(Act X of 1871) in the same year. (This Act X was incorporated in 1880 in the Cess Act, Bengal Act IX of 1880). Under this Act a District Committee was constituted under the chairmanship of the District Magistrate. The members were all nominated, though there was provision for election under some conditions. Two-thirds of the members had however, to be non-officials. These committees were called District Road Committees. It is interesting to remember that even when this Bill was being considered by the Legislative Council, a point of view was expressed that the district was far too large an area for local opinion being effectively brought to bear upon the solution of local problems. In deference to this opinion it was provided for in the Act that branch committees might be constituted at the discretion of the Government. But during the fifteen years that this Act was effective the district remained the unit. No branch (subdivisional) committee was constituted. Besides, it should be emphasised that the District Road Committees like the panchayats in villages were to all intents and purposes ad hoc bodies. They were concerned only with building and repairing of roads and elementary drainage and not, as desired earlier, compendious bodies.

The next landmark in the evolution of local bodies as an ancillary to general administration was the despatch of the Government of India to the Provincial Governments in 1881. The Government of India was at this time headed by Lord Ripon, a distinguished Liberal statesman. In this despatch it was suggested that in every district a compendious local body should be set up with the District Magistrate as ex-officio chairman. It would be concerned with the expansion of education, ministering to public health and sanitation, the building up of roads and opening of communications. This body would have its jurisdiction over all the non-municipal areas of the district. Ancillary sub-committees of this body might be set up in every sub-division. Two-thirds of the members would be non-official (nominated or elected). The organisation was thus largely to be of the same character as in the case of the Road Committees which had been in existence since 1871, though differing from them to some extent in respect of functions.

This despatch of Lord Ripon's Government set the ball rolling but more than three years were taken up in the discussion of the actual shape, the measure to implement the suggestion of the Government of India would take. The points at issue were (i) whether the district was a suitable unit (ii) whether elective principle should be frankly accepted or evasively provided for (iii) whether the District Magistrate should be the chairman ex-officio or whether the elective principle should be adopted in this regard as well and (iv) whether these local bodies should be supervised and controlled by district officers of the Government or whether there should be constituted a Local Government Board on the provincial basis to exercise supervision and control. Even when permission to introduce the Bengal Local Self-Government Bill in the Legislative Council was sought in January 1883, these controversies had not really



been set at rest. In fact the Bill which was introduced had to be recast and reintroduced. In any event, to cut the long story short, the Bill was finally passed in April 1885 and became the Bengal Local Self-Government Act of that year (Act 111 of 1885). The Act did not provide for any Provincial Board. It provided for a district board which would, however, have the responsibility of supervising and controlling the local boards (set up with subdivisions as units). When the full quota of local boards would be constituted, at least half of the members of the district board would be elected. The chairman of the district board might be elected by the members of the board or appointed by the Government at its discretion. The Act remained in force during all the remaining years of our period. During these years the district board was not merely supervising and controlling local boards but actually did the major portion of the work assigned to these bodies. The local boards could exercise only delegated powers. The district magistrate was invariably appointed the chairman of the district board and the sub-divisional officer became the chairman of the local board. So bureaucratic control was relaxed but not to any appreciable extent.

When our period opens municipal government both in Calcutta and in mufassil was in a very rudimentary state. In Calcutta the administration of municipal affairs was entrusted to some justices but the powers and responsibilities vested in them were exercised really by the Chief Magistrate. In 1840 and 1847 an attempt was made in a haphazard way to transform municipal government in Calcutta into local self-government. But the attempt proved inevitably abortive. By the Act of 1856 the Government vested municipal administration in three Commissioners appointed by itself. But this Act was not a settler. In 1861 a Commission was constituted with W. S. Seton-Karr as chairman to look into the municipal affairs of Calcutta and make recommendations. When, however, legislation was finally undertaken in 1863, it was not based on the recommendations of this Commission. The principle which appealed to the Government and the Legislative Council (which in Bengal was for the first time set up in 1862) was that of combining "popular representation with the concentration of executive power in the hands of a highly paid officer". Accordingly Act VI of 1863 was passed. It did not provide for popular representation by election. It provided for a body of justices, large in number, presided over by an official chairman appointed by the Government. Justices, appointed by the Government not only for Calcutta but also for the outlying parts of the province (provided these mufassil justices were for the time being resident in Calcutta), would attend meetings of the justices. They constituted a corporate body for the administration of Calcutta's municipal affairs. So the foundation was laid of the Calcutta Corporation as we have known it since then. It was claimed that as justices were chosen from different classes of people, all these classes were represented in the Corporation, though the system of election was not introduced.



That this theory was not tenable was illustrated by the demand behind the Act which had to be passed in 1876 (Act IV of that year). This measure provided for election of two-thirds of the Commissioners (members of the Corporation) by the rate-payers. Otherwise the structure was not very much changed. The body of the Commissioners was presided over by an official chairman appointed by the Government, though removable by two-thirds of the Commissioners. All executive authority was vested in this Chairman. The Act was revised in 1888 (Act 11 of that year) but not vitally. This vital change was effected in Calcutta's municipal administration by Act 111 of 1899. The conduct of this administration with the assistance and cooperation of the Commissioners two-thirds of whom were elected by the rate-payers became an eye-sore to the European business community. Nor had Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the lieutenant-Governor of Bengal from 1895, any fascination for representative institutions. He was of opinion that British municipalities could be run effectively by representative bodies only because British businessmen took an active part in these bodies. The implication of this observation was clear. When Lord Curzon arrived in India as Viceroy, he had further support from this reactionary pro-consul in the step which was taken at his instance by the Legislative Council. The Act of 1888 was replaced by one under which the authority of the Corporation would be dispersed. The Chairman, the General Committee and the Commissioners became three separate authorities, each invested with certain responsibilities. The number of Commissioners was reduced to fifty of whom twenty-five only would be elected by wards, fifteen would be appointed by the Government and the remaining ten would be elected by the European-controlled bodies like the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta Trades Association and the Port Trust. The General Committee also would consist of twelve members, four being elected by elected councillors, four returned by the Government and four by European interests. It is no wonder that twenty-eight Indian municipal commissioners headed by Surendranath Banerjea left the Corporation as a protest against this reactionary legislation. During the next six years of our period and eighteen years thereafter this black Act remained effective. In fact it remained on the statute book until Surendranath Banerjea took his revenge in 1923.

Outside Calcutta also towns were growing. Some of them were old but some came to flourish because they became administrative centres and attracted an increasing population on that score. An Act (XXVI of 1850) had been passed to give option to people of towns to apply for municipal administration. Little came out of it.\* Then Bengal Act 111 of 1864 was passed and it empowered the Government to set up a muni-

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\* Only two towns were known to have taken advantage of it in the Province of Bengal. Howrah municipality was set up in 1862, under a Special Act, passed in 1858 (Act XII of 1858) (See G. Bonnerjee—Howrah Civic Companion, Vol. I, pp. 36-38, 50).



cipality in a town. It was to consist of at least seven commissioners appointed by the Government. The important Government officials were to be among municipal commissioners. In order that smaller towns might get benefit of municipal institutions, in 1868 another Act was passed called the District Town Act (Act VI of that year). It laid down that of the members nominated not more than one-third would be officials. (It is interesting to remember that some of our existing municipalities date their origin in the sixties of the last century.) It need not be emphasised that the Acts so far passed on municipal government had great shortcomings. Nor was the Bengal Municipal Act passed in 1876 (Act V of that year) very much of an improvement although it made elective system possible if one-third of the rate-payers in a town asked for it. It is to be noted that only Burdwan, Serampore and Krishnagar took advantage of this optional clause and secured the elective system. But even in Patna, Hooghly, and Dacca, the requirement could not be fulfilled and the elective system could not be introduced.

During Lord Ripon's Viceroyalty new wind blew from Government House and new ideas were abroad as to local self-government both for rural and urban purposes. Accordingly in 1882 Mr. H. J. Reynolds asked leave of the Bengal Legislative Council on behalf of the Government of Bengal to introduce the new Bengal Municipal Bill which would be both a consolidating and an amending bill. The Bill was introduced by him in the Council in January 1883 and referred to a Select Committee. It took more than a year to be finally passed by the Council and to become Act 111 of 1884. It divided the municipalities of Bengal into three categories. In the first category were included those municipalities which were not scheduled. Two-thirds of their commissioners would be elected by the rate-payers and their chairmen and vice-chairmen would be elected by the Commissioners. In the first schedule were included a few municipalities whose commissioners would all be appointed and in the second schedule were placed those few municipalities whose chairmen would be appointed. This municipal Act of 1884 remained the basis of municipal government of Bengal outside Calcutta during the rest of our period and beyond. While it provided for civic affairs being run by representatives of the rate-payers, the control of the Government through its district and divisional officers was not very much relaxed. The budget estimates had for instance to be transmitted to the District Magistrate and with his observations to the Divisional Commissioner. This was not local self-government in full play. But it relieved undiluted bureaucratic control to some extent over at least one branch of public activity. Administrative history of Bengal during the period 1833 to 1905 was otherwise the history of the bureaucracy which was sometimes headed by liberal officers like Sir John Peter Grant and Sir Richard Temple but more often by conservative diehards like Sir George Campbell and Sir Alexander Mackenzie.

As we get near the end of our period a crisis was deepening in our



administrative history. The provincial boundaries in British India had to be drawn up by the exigencies of British expansion. They had never so far been thought of in a scientific way. In the language of Lord Curzon these boundaries were, by the time he took over the Viceroyalty, "antiquated, illogical and productive of inefficiency". The fun of the thing was that the decision he took in this regard was still more illogical and unscientific. Before 1874 the province of Bengal included Bengal proper, Bihar, Orissa and Assam. In 1874 Assam was separated and made into a Chief Commissionership, responsible directly to the Government of India. In order that Assam might be, to some extent at least, a viable province, the district of Sylhet which was part of Bengal proper was tacked on to it. Here the redistribution ended. But the vast regions which remained part and parcel of Bengal were too ill-assorted and too far-flung for efficient administration from the same headquarters.

Accordingly from the early nineties talks were started for some kind of redistribution. But bureaucratic talks may be as endless as in the case of a democracy. The only difference is that while democracy talks orally and loudly, the bureaucracy talks in files and in outward silence. At last a file regarding the proposal of Sir Andrew Fraser, Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, for the transfer of the Oriya-speaking Sambalpur district to the Orissa Division of Bengal came into the hands of Lord Curzon. This gave him an incentive to think of a larger plan for the reorganisation of the boundaries of Bengal. He decided to divide the province. At first the idea was to transfer the Chittagong division to Assam by way of relieving Bengal and strengthening Assam. Then the plan developed to the extent of annexing two districts of the Dacca division as well to Assam. The final shape of the plan was that a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam\* would be created and in it would be included all the existing Assam districts as well the districts of the Dacca, Chittagong and Rajshahi divisions of Bengal. Bengal would consist of the Presidency and Burdwan divisions, Bihar and Orissa. No plan could be more unscientific from the point of view of linguistic particularism. But Lord Curzon rode roughshod over it. The plan went into effect in October 1905. With the partition, storm clouds which had been gathering, burst in fury. In the midst of this turmoil we close our period.

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\* The name suggested by Lord Curzon's Government was North-Eastern Province. But the Secretary of State substituted the name of East Bengal and Assam.





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## POLITICAL IDEAS (1833-1905)

Political thought, freed from the trammels of ancient shashtric conventions and shackles of mediaeval pattern, and understood as a modern concept, is one of the several remarkable products of the revolutionary transformation, commonly known as the Renaissance. The Indian Renaissance, generally speaking, was less a revival of the past and more an adaptation of the old to the pattern of state and society which had begun to emerge and take shape on the soil nurtured with the seeds of western learning and culture. Bengal was the first to draw upon herself the light that emanated from the west, and this marked her out as the sponsor of new and well-defined political ideas and ideals which made their influence steadily felt over other parts of the country and helped her to become 'a path-finder and a light-bringer to the rest of India.'<sup>1</sup>

But then a word of caution needs be uttered at the outset. Historically speaking, political thought, as a modern concept, is not a phenomenon to be studied solely in terms of the newly imported western outlook. Men's thoughts and actions are largely conditioned by inherited characteristics which date back to remote past and as such, in a study of the growth of political ideas, within a given time, one can ill afford to ignore or neglect the background prepared, over ages, by physical, biological and mental environments of its people. So far as Bengal is concerned, these were certainly influenced and quickened by the 18th century contact with the western world, but it was not (and indeed could not be) entirely divorced from the context of beliefs, ideals and convictions which had invariably cast their spell on the pattern and thought of the leaders of the people. Political thought such as may be traced during the period commencing with the battle of Plassey and ending with the death of the 'first modern Indian' Raja Rammohan Roy, may be characterised as modern in that it was an adaptation of essentially Indian thoughts to the form or technique of western political theories and practices, in modification, but not in total rejection, of ancient and mediaeval concepts.

It is customary to deny the existence of any sense of patriotism and nationalism in the days of the advent of the British in India.<sup>2</sup> It has been observed that "political thought in the modern academic sense is a development possible only in a free state working out its destiny, or in a new state in process of formation out of the chaos of political strifes. In a country like ours, amongst a people who have for ages been ruled over by a succession of foreigners no other political development is normally possible except acquiescence and encrusted conservation in self-defence."<sup>3</sup> To deny the existence of a sense of patriotism and nationalism or to suggest the impossibility of political development other than that of "acquiescence and encrusted conservation in self-defence" is to deny the development of a systematised political thought, understood in the



modern sense of the phrase, but not the existence of political ideas as part of inheritance from the past.

To Raja Rammohan Roy belongs the credit of sponsoring political thought in its modern and systematised form, based on definite theories and creeds, largely derived from the school of western political thought. It has been said that "his political ideas developed on the lines laid down by Montesquieu, Blackstone and Bentham, with whose writings he appears to have been quite familiar."<sup>4</sup> The consolidation of British rule and the resultant elaboration of the administrative machinery provided him with an opportunity of focussing on them the search-light of his criticism, enriched by his intimate acquaintance with the trends of contemporary political thought of the western world. He was by no means a theorist or a doctrinaire. A believer in the inductive and historical method, Ram Mohan was essentially a practical constitutional reformer. Being conversant with the attitude and outlook of his countrymen, for centuries subjected to foreign domination, and devoid of political training and initiative, he refrained from thinking in terms of political freedom and contented himself with demanding what amounted to an honourable partnership between the government and the governed, assuring to the latter the enjoyment of full civil rights and individual liberty, while conceding to the former the rights and prerogatives of sovereignty. With his faith firmly implanted on British justice and enlightenment, the Raja thanked "the Supreme Disposer of the Universe, for having unexpectedly delivered this country, from the long continued tyranny of its former Rulers and placed it under the Government of the English, a nation who not only are blessed with the enjoyment of civil and political liberty, but also interest themselves in promoting liberty and social happiness as well as free enquiry into liberty and religious subjects, among those nations to which the influence extends."<sup>5</sup> Similar sentiments eloquently emphasising the good fortune of the Indian people in being "fortunately placed by Providence under the protection of the whole British Nation," find expression in his Memorial to the Supreme Court, March 1823.<sup>6</sup>

But within the framework of the sovereign rule of the British Raj, Ram Mohan was politically progressive and liberal enough to visualise a rule of law, deriving its moral sanction from "the influence of the intelligent and respectable classes of the inhabitants, and by the general will of the people, and not any longer stand isolated in the midst of its subjects, supporting itself merely by the exertion of superior force."<sup>7</sup> His refreshingly liberal and enlightened outlook induced him to champion the cause of the freedom of the press. The Press Ordinance of 1823 prescribing that no one should publish a newspaper or other periodical without having previously obtained a license from the Governor-General-in-Council evoked from him emphatic protest. In a memorial submitted to the Supreme Court in March 1823 Ram Mohun wrote: "Every good ruler, . . . must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast empire ; and therefore he will be anxious to afford every



individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestrained Liberty of publication is the only effectual means that can be employed. And should it ever be abused, the established Law of the Land is very properly armed with sufficient powers to punish those who may be found guilty of misrepresenting the conduct or character of government which are effectually guarded by the same Laws to which individuals must look for protection of their reputation and good name."<sup>8</sup> In his *Appeal to the King-in-Council* submitted to King George IV, through the Board of Control in 1825, he emphasised the effective role that a free press was expected to play as a link between the legislative body and the Indian people. He dwelt upon the need of encouraging the growth of a free press so that it could ventilate and even redress such grievances as the governed might reasonably suffer from. A free press, he added, would enable "the Court of Directors to ascertain correctly whether the systems introduced in their possessions, prove so beneficial to the natives of the country, as their authors might fondly suppose or would have others believe, and whether the Rules and Regulations which may appear excellent in their eyes, are strictly put in practice." As a means of eliciting 'impartial information' he suggested the adoption of one of two methods viz. (a) "The establishment of Newspapers in the different districts under the special patronage of the Court of Directors and subject to the control of law" and (b) the appointment of Commissions "composed of gentlemen of intelligence and respectability, totally unconnected with the Governing Body in this country, which may from time to time, investigate on the spot, the condition of Your Majesty's faithful subjects, and judge with their own eyes regarding the operation of the systems of law and jurisprudence under which they live".<sup>10</sup> The Raja made no secret of the fact that he preferred the first to the second method. A third alternative hinted by the Raja for ascertaining public opinion by sending a copy of the proposed legislative measure "to the principal zamindars" of Burdwan, Bihar, Banaras etc. and "the Muftis of Sadar Dewani Adalat and the head Native officers of the Boards of Revenue for their opinion on each clause of the Regulation" has been cited as "hopelessly antiquated,"<sup>12</sup> obviously judged by the modern standard. It would be well to remember that the Raja was a reformer and not a revolutionary, a practical statesman and not a doctrinaire, an innovator not without obvious limitations.

The same liberalism of outlook was at work in encouraging him to oppose the proposed formation of a Legislative Council on the eve of the expiry of the Charter Act of 1813 on the grounds that (a) its composition, as conceived, would reflect the majority of the Company's servants who, there was reason to fear, would "contract prejudices against individuals of classes of men which ought not to find shelter in the breasts of the Legislator."<sup>13</sup> and (b) it would violate the theory of separation of powers (which he is supposed to have derived from Montesquieu<sup>14</sup>) by enabling



the Executive to add law-making to its functions. He welcomed the British Parliament, representing the enlightened public opinion of England, as the supreme governing authority of the country in preference to a bureaucratically organised legislature.

In 1827 Ram Mohan raised his voice of protest against the Jury Act which conferred on the christians (including native converts) the right of being tried with the aid of a jury composed exclusively of their co-religionists—a right which was denied to the hindus and the muslims, who, in addition to this, were declared ineligible for serving as Grand Jurors. Ram Mohan characterised the act as 'unjust and oppressive', 'serving to degrade (other than the intended beneficiaries) in the scale of the society.'<sup>15</sup> Two years later in 1829 Ram Mohan sent in a strong protest against Regulation III of 1828 for the resumption of rent-free lands.<sup>16</sup> The progressive make-up of Ram Mohan's mind and intellect as well as his political liberalism were also manifested in his efforts aimed at securing, within certain limitations, the separation of executive and judicial functions, the improvement of the existing judiciary by providing for native assessors in the civil court, the right of trial by jury and the appointment of qualified Indians to higher posts at the disposal of the government.

However circumscribed the political outlook of the Raja might appear to the modern mind, in so far as his implicit faith in the enlightened character of the British rule, "the impartial justice of the British government and in the acknowledged wisdom which governs and directs all its measures in the just spirit of an enlarged and liberal policy,"<sup>17</sup> or the mode of ascertainment of public opinion is concerned, a refreshing feature of his political philosophy is its cosmopolitan approach. It reflects no small credit on his political acumen that he was able to use a canvas broad enough to encompass the struggling nationalities of the world. His love of liberty was by no means conditioned by the geographical limitations of the country in which he was born. Living in an age in which the plant of nationalism was yet to grow in India, he could conjure the vision of a world bound together by a spirit of international amity. He was deeply pained on receipt of the news of the collapse of the Neapolitan movement aimed at liberation in 1821, though he did not lose his faith in its ultimate and inevitable victory. "Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism," he wrote in a letter to Buckingham, August 11, 1821, "have never been and never will be ultimately successful"<sup>18</sup>. He celebrated the triumph of the party pledged to constitutional government in Spain with illuminations and public dinner,<sup>19</sup> at the Town Hall. The revolutionary upheavals in Europe in 1830 stirred his heart to its depths and brought out congratulatory messages on the success of the July Revolution in France and the enactment of the First Reform Bill in England.

Ram Mohan was far ahead of his age not only by reason of his cosmopolitan outlook transcending all barriers of race, creed, colour and country, but also by virtue of his appreciation of the need of an inter-



national organisation to which disputes among nations could be referred for peaceful settlement through arbitration. In a memorandum submitted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Paris, seeking permission to visit the country, the Raja wrote: "On general grounds I beg to observe that it appears to me, the ends of constitutional Government might be better attained by submitting every matter of political difference between two countries to a congress composed of an equal number from the Parliament of each ; the decision of the majority to be acquiesced in by both nations and the chairman to be chosen by each nation alternately, for one year, and the place of meeting to be one year within the limits of one country and next within those of the other. . . . By such a congress all matters of difference, whether political or commercial, affecting the Natives of any two civilized countries with constitutional Government, might be settled amicably and justly to the satisfaction of both and profound peace and friendly feelings might be preserved between them from generation to generation."<sup>20</sup>

Ram Mohan's political activities conducted in India till 1830 were continued with sustained vigour in England till his death there three years later (September 1833). His work survived his death. An objective, impartial, historical judgment will have little hesitation in claiming Ram Mohan as the precursor of the liberal constitutional political movement which was destined to leave its impress on the course and character of political development in India during at least half a century that followed his death. He was the first link in the chain that inter-connected the various phases of political thought and movement in India enabling her to reach the destined end in a little over a century since the death of the pioneer among the political thinkers of modern India.

The flame lit by Ram Mohan not only continued undimmed but added to its lustre through the untiring efforts of the succeeding generation. The first in the field were the youthful products of the Hindu College, most of whom had come in contact with the Raja towards the closing years of his career in India. A correspondent of the *Englishman* writing in May 1836 observed: "In matters of politics, they are all radicals and are followers of Benthamite principles."<sup>21</sup> Their ideas and thinking were influenced by the American and French Revolutions, the stirring struggle between Reaction and Revolution which convulsed western and central Europe in the decades after the overthrow of Napoleon and the writings of political thinkers of the West like Voltaire, Hume, Locke, Reid, Tom Paine and others. They learnt their lessons at the feet of the great 'animating, enlightening' teacher, H. L. V. Derozio, a high-priest of intense patriotism and an ardent lover of liberty. They expressed their unbounded rejoicings at the success of the July Revolution (1830) in France and some enthusiasts among them were responsible for hoisting the tri-colour flag on the top of the Ochterlony Monument on the Christmas Day, 1830, following a banquet in celebration of the Revolution held two weeks earlier (Dec. 10). They gave free expression to



their ideas welcoming in Bengal a revolutionary upheaval similar to the one which had occurred in France. One of them Kashiprasad Ghosh (1809-1873) composed a poem which has been described as "the first cry of patriotic fervour ..... which found its most brilliant expression in the *Bande Mataram* song of Bankim Chandra."<sup>22</sup>

It would be a mistake to suppose that the youthful products of the Hindu College, the Derozians (more commonly called *Young Bengal*) were mere sentimental windbags or impractical idealists. They focussed the search-light of their criticism on problems of specific nature to which Raja Ram Mohan had already drawn the attention of the enlightened section of his countrymen. They organised meetings at the Town Hall to record their protest against the Press Regulation<sup>23</sup>, the export of coolies to Mauritius<sup>24</sup> and demanding extension of jury system.<sup>25</sup> One of the most prominent among the Derozians was *Rasik Krishna Mallik* (c. 1810-1858) who edited a bi-lingual journal, *Jnananveshan* with the laudable object of disseminating instruction in 'the science of government and jurisprudence.' In a speech delivered at a public meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall (January 5, 1835) he criticised the Charter Act of 1833 which completely ignored the interests of the people of India. He wrote articles condemning the existing police organisation, pleading the cause of fair and impartial justice and demanding the appointment of an increasingly large percentage of qualified Indians to responsible offices under the government. His criticism of the judicial and general administration was surprisingly bold and outspoken, revealing lack of faith in British justice. "The administration of justice in British India," he wrote, "is so much characterised by everything that is opposed to the just principles of government, that we offer no apology to introduce it to the notice of our readers..... The administration of British India must necessarily be composed of a council of merchants, whose principal aim as such will be to promote their own interests and to manage their affairs with as little expense as possible. In a word, they will try to make their government subservient to the one ignoble principle of gain."<sup>26</sup>

Another shining star in the galaxy of *Young Bengal* was *Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay* (1814-1878). His paper on "The Present state of the East India Company's criminal judicature and police under the Bengal Presidency", read at a meeting of the *Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge* on February 8, 1843, is a bold and lucid exposition of the views of an enlightened and patriotic Indian on the evils associated with the prevailing system of justice. He was a vehement and uncompromising critic of all forms of inequality, political, economic and social and he accused the government and vested interests like those represented by the priestly class of denying to the people "their birth right to equality." While he declared that "he was no enemy to British rule," he did not hesitate to condemn foreign rule as, in his opinion, its main purpose was "the gratification of their love of gold" and since it did not act up to the maxim that "governments are for the good of the many and not the few."



He raised his voice in protest against corruption in the administration of justice and pleaded for Indianisation of services on the one hand and the organisation of public opinion on the other, as measures calculated to tone up the character of the administration. Dakshinaranjan even formulated a plan providing, for each province, a legislature to be composed of equal numbers of government nominees and representatives of the people, empowered to "check and examine the accounts to be furnished to them by all the departmental heads of the provincial governments and to advise government as to the proper mode of levying taxes, when the exigencies of the state may absolutely require it."<sup>27</sup>

Another member of the circle, *fidus et audax*, was Tarachand Chakravarti (c. 1804-1855), a senior contemporary of Rasik Krishna and Dakshinaranjan. In the columns of the '*Bengal Spectator*' he gave free expression to his political views, extolling the ideals which an enlightened government should aim at—"the protection of rights, the prevention of wrongs and the consequent promotion of happiness", among others, advocating the Indianisation of services and condemning the maintenance of the civil service as a monopoly of the Englishmen, as a system which "represses the expansion of talent and genius among the different classes of the people and prevents industry, merit and character from being duly remunerated."

Other prominent members of the group were Ram Gopal Ghosh, Peary Chand Mitra and Krishna Mohan Banerjee, each of whom contributed much to the growth of political consciousness of the people among whom they moved and worked. While *Ram Gopal* (1815-1868) followed the foot-steps of Ram Mohan in demanding the extension of the jury system, the employment of a larger number of Indians to public offices and the removal of all distinctions based on colour and race in the award of justice, *Peary Chand Mitra* (1814-1883) wrote thoughtful articles dealing with the origin and functions of government and tried to impress on the ruling authorities that they could not properly and adequately discharge their legitimate functions without consulting the opinion of the governed and that "it shall be the duty of the ruling authority to protect equally all classes of its subjects, but the opulent and powerful do not require so much of its constant care and anxiety as the poor and the helpless."<sup>28</sup> Even *Krishnamohan*, much of whose time and energies were taken up by his work as a scholar and an evangelist, in his later years<sup>29</sup> became actively interested in politics both as a member of the Indian League and as President of the Indian Association.

While the Derozians have come in for a good deal of criticism<sup>30</sup> on account of their lack of reverence for the social and religious institutions of the country, not unoften, carried to excesses, the importance of their political role certainly deserves to be appreciated. In many respects they carried on the political programme laid down by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and some of their efforts, viz. those directed against the Press Regulations and the virtual exclusion of Indians from responsible posts under the



Government met with qualified success. But there was a fundamental difference between their outlook and that of the Raja. So far as their reaction to the problem of the ryots and the plan of European colonisation<sup>31</sup> in India, as conceived of by Ram Mohan is concerned, they represented more progressive views. Some of them were clearly disillusioned about the British rule and were convinced that its foreign character rendered it inherently incapable of serving the interests of India and her people. Unlike Ram Mohan, the Derozians, at least during the earlier phase of their activities, did not attempt any synthesis between the tradition of India's past and the trends of contemporary western political thought. They deluded themselves into believing that it was possible to radically reconstruct India's society and government in accordance with the principles of Western Radicalism. In wishing for the outbreak of a Revolution in Bengal similar to the French upheaval of July 1830 they allowed their enthusiasm to outrun their discretion. In later years the fire-brand element in them tended to fade out and through their writings in the columns of their periodicals like the *Parthenon*, *Hesperus*, *Jnan-anveshan*, the *Quill*, the *Hindu Pioneer*<sup>32</sup>, the *Bengal Spectator*, the *Reformer* and the *Inquirer* and through their speeches before learned societies like the Academic Association, Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, the stalwarts of Young Bengal "made great efforts to rouse the political consciousness of the people of Bengal."<sup>33</sup>

But neither Ram Mohan nor the Young Bengal did (or possibly could) direct their efforts to build up a sustained movement on an appreciable scale or even develop a systematised philosophy or ideology.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from the Derozians there were others who, under the inspiration of Ram Mohan's political ideas, had begun to take an increasingly active interest in contemporary political problems. The most well-known among them were the two Tagores—Dwarkanath and Prasanna Coomer, Akshoy Kumar Datta, Editor of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* and Girish Chandra Ghosh, the founder-editor of the *Bengalee*. Dwarkanath and Prasanna Coomer exerted themselves strenuously to carry on the movement started by Ram Mohan for political reforms, through constitutional methods and by appeal to enlightened public opinion in India and England. Both of them were actively associated with the Press—Prasanna Coomer as the Editor of the *Reformer* and Dwarkanath as owner of the *India Gazette* later amalgamated with the *Bengal Chronicle* and the *Bengal Harukaru*. While positive evidence of Prasanna Coomer's association with the *Bangabhasa-Prakashika-sabha*, founded towards the close of 1836 and described as "the first political association to be established in Bengal"<sup>35</sup> is lacking, he was one of the founders of the Zamindary Association, later known as the *Landholders' Society*, with a better claim to be regarded as "the first organisation of Bengal with a distinct political object"<sup>36</sup>. Its first meeting held on November 12, 1837 laid down that "the Zamindary Association is intended to embrace people of all descriptions, without reference to caste, country or complexion and rejecting all exclusiveness,



is to be based on the most universal and liberal principles, the only qualification to become its members being the possession of interest in the soil of the country."<sup>37</sup> The *Bengal Harukaru* in its issues of December 14 and 16, 1839 refers to a speech<sup>38</sup> delivered before the Society by Mr. Turton, which judged by the mid-nineteenth century standard, reflects extraordinarily liberal views of the speaker on the status of the Indian subjects, claiming for them the status of brethren in every respect, as constituting a part of the kingdom of Britain, as fellow subjects and the same feeling, the same interests and objects and the same rights as the British-born inhabitants of England.

Another noteworthy feature about the Landholders' Society was that since its inception, it took cognisance of the common problems that bound the provinces of India as a whole, and decided to establish 'branch Societies in every district of the British Indian Empire.' While the avowed object of the Association was 'to promote the general interest of the land-holders,' it did not neglect, as Rajendra Lal Mitra claimed, the rights of the ryots. In his opinion, it gave to the people the first lesson in the art of fighting constitutionally for their rights and taught them manfully to assert their claims and gave expression to their opinions."

Dwarkanath gave an impetus to the cause of political movement along progressive lines by causing George Thompson, an eminent English orator, widely respected for his liberal views, to accompany him to India on his return from England (January 1843). Thompson created unprecedented enthusiasm among the youths of Bengal by his discourses on topics of public interest delivered with the aid of persuasive eloquence. For some time prior to his arrival, the Landholders' Association seemed to have been lulled into inaction and the *Friend of India* in its issue of February 23, 1843 observed: "If we are not mistaken it is the arrival of Mr. George Thompson which has broken its long sleep."<sup>39</sup> It was at Thompson's suggestion that a new political association, known as the *Bengal British India Society* was formed (April 20, 1843). Its object, among others, was "the collection and dissemination of information, relating to the actual condition of the people of British India, and the laws and institutions, and resources of the country, and to employ such other means of a peaceable and lawful character, as may appear calculated to secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow-subjects."<sup>40</sup>

While the sponsors of the two associations—the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society—were aristocratically inclined to be conservative and loyalist in sentiments, they were not averse to the anomalies in the prevailing system of administration. Within the limitation inherent in their political and social outlook, they were progressive enough to demand the abolition of restrictions on Press, the introduction of trial by jury, Indianisation of Public Service, separation of executive and judicial powers etc.

The *Tattavabodhini Sabha* founded on the initiative of Debendranath



Tagore on October 6, 1839 also had to its credit distinctive service in quickening, in its own way, political consciousness among the educated middle-class. *The Sabha* was by no means a political association. But its sustained activities in literary, social and religious spheres invariably helped to foster a sense of patriotic self-respect and national consciousness. It was perhaps more than an accident that Debendranath was called upon to serve as the first Secretary of the British Indian Association founded within twelve years of the inauguration of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*. His role in drafting the memorandum presented on behalf of the British Indian Association to the British Parliament, upholding therein the advisability of introducing a modified form of self-government is often lost sight of in the context of his remarkable contributions to the cultural resurgence of India.

Apart from political associations, the Indian press too rendered appreciable service in quickening political consciousness in Bengal. The service rendered in this connection by the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* and its erudite editor Akshoy Kumar Datta (1820-1886) deserves to be specially mentioned. By reason of his intimate acquaintance with the leaders of western political thought, Akshoy Kumar was an ardent advocate of Rationalism and a believer in the organismic theory of society. He stressed the maxim that the right enjoyed by the government enjoined upon it proper fulfilment of duties to the governed. In his view government, as the representative body of the subject, is under legal and moral obligation not only to protect life and property of citizens, but also to promote their all-round prosperity—physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual. He boldly attacked the failure of the British Indian administration in fulfilling these primary obligations especially in regard to the ryots living in the midst of poverty and exposed to the oppression by the indigo-planters among others. To him belongs the credit of being the first Indian to plead for the helpless ryots through the columns of his journal.

But neither the Derozians nor the political disciples of Raja Ram Mohan Roy made any conscious efforts to rouse political consciousness on a large scale affecting even a substantial section of the mass of their countrymen. The two political associations of those days too were essentially aristocratic, being confined to 'the aristocracy of wealth and aristocracy of intelligence.' In its issue dated 2nd March 1852 the *Samvad-Prabhakar*<sup>41</sup> lamented the failure of the two societies in rousing any sustained or organised political consciousness or in rendering any permanent contribution to the well-being or advancement of the people, apart from mobilising opinion in regard to topics like resumption of rent free lands, press laws etc. and through the political exhortations of George Thompson. The same source also refers to efforts undertaken without success to revitalise these associations.

The urge for bringing a more effective and representative association was felt all the more since 1849 principally for two reasons. (1) The determined opposition of the European communities to the proposal of



Drinkwater Bethune, the then Law Member of the Governor-General's Council, recommending that the British born subjects of the crown should be brought under the jurisdiction of all courts (and not merely of the Supreme Court whose jurisdiction alone extended over them so long), operating in British India and the subsequent withdrawal of the proposed measure emphasised the urgency of organising political opinion in India on a more effective basis. (2) The urge towards mobilising Indian public opinion through representative organisations was felt to be imperative in the context of the impending termination of the Charter Act in 1853.

This prepared the background of the new venture—the foundation of the British Indian Association on October 29, 1851. Its aims and objects, as defined by its promoters, among others, were “to promote the improvement and efficiency of the British Indian government by every legitimate means in its power and thereby to advance the common interests of Great Britain and India and to ameliorate the condition of the native inhabitants of the subject territory, . . . . to remove the existing defects in the laws and the civil administration of the country and to promote the general welfare and interests of its people and to memorialise the authorities here and in England for removal of existing and prevention of proposed injurious measures or for the introduction of enactments which may tend to promote the general interests of all connected with this country.” The Association acted upto its professed aims, took active interest in all proposals of legislative and administrative measures, organised public meetings in Calcutta and in mofussil towns, adopted measures calculated to educate the public on current political and social problems and sought redress of individual grievances involving questions of general principles. Unlike its predecessor, the Association was cast in a wider mould as the principal organ of Indian political opinion. Other elements of progress were derived from the fact that the British Indian Association encouraged, from the very beginning, the establishment of similar institutions in other parts of India and of Branch Associations operating in several districts of Bengal, and its initiation in effecting a coordination of activities on questions of national importance.<sup>42</sup>

Two decades intervene between the death of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the inauguration of the British Indian Association. The progress in the development of political ideas and activities was by no means inconsiderable and the hope expressed by Dwarkanath Tagore in 1839 that the youths should “organise themselves into a compact band of patriots for the assertion or preservation of their political rights and redress of their grievances” seemed to have been substantially fulfilled. The memorandum sent by the British Indian Association to the Parliament in 1852 has justly been regarded as “the first political document of constructive statesmanship emanating from an Indian public body.”<sup>43</sup> Attempts were made to extend the activities of the Association beyond the geographical limits of Bengal. The middle classes too had begun to take share in political activities through public bodies which were no longer the mono-



poly of the land-owning aristocracy. It has been even suggested that "politics had by now left its purely feudal moorings and had started dealing with the problems of the common man,"<sup>44</sup> for the Association, at the instance of its first Secretary, Debendranath Tagore, had demanded revision of the Chowkidari system and protested against the existing tax on salt.

But, generally speaking, the progress achieved by 1850's was not in all respects indicative of any fundamental or radical change since 1830's. The approach and attitude associated with the mid-nineteenth century trends of political thought indicate change in degree rather than in kind. During these years the same belief in regard to efficacy of appeal to British justice and enlightenment persisted, the conviction of petition as an effective remedy remained unshaken and, as before, greater importance continued to be attached to impressing enlightened public opinion in England than to quickening or organising political opinion in India through mass contact. The criticism that "constructive policy they had none, and seldom, if ever, they laid down any programme of systematic action for the political advancement of the country"<sup>45</sup> is hard to refute convincingly. Bipin Chandra Pal was perhaps less justified in observing that none of the political associations, not excluding the British Indian Association, "had an all-India outlook".<sup>46</sup> But even granting that this Association was in close contact with similar other organisations, like those in Madras and elsewhere, and that it worked through several branches in Bengal districts, it can hardly be refuted that the concept embracing India, as a whole, was yet to make its influence actively felt in the sphere of India's political thought. An interesting speculation would perhaps suggest that such a concept, properly organised and propagated, would possibly have spared India the violent outbursts of 1857 or at any rate have given them a different complexion altogether.

The post-mutiny era in Bengal saw an unmistakable tendency towards the growth of bolder political philosophy deriving its main inspiration from nationalism. The final and inevitable trend of India's political evolution found its first and unequivocal expression in the columns of the *Hindu Patriot*. In its issue of January 14, 1858 occur the memorable words from the pen of its editor, Haris Chandra Mukherji, in connection with the proposed transfer of the government of India from the Company to the Crown: "Can a revolution in the Indian Government be authorised by Parliament without consulting the wishes of the vast millions of men for whose benefit it is proposed to be made? The reply must be in the negative..... The time is nearly come when all Indian questions must be solved by Indians". The era, referred to by Sir Charles Trevelyan (1838) in which amongst those who had received English education "the most sanguine dimly look forward in the distant future to the establishment of a national representative assembly as the consummation of their hopes—all of them being fully sensible that these plans of improvement could only be worked out with the aid and protection of the British govern-



ment<sup>47</sup> was definitely over. The rapid spread of liberal education through the recently set-up universities, the growth of a reverential attitude towards India's past, effected as a result of extensive researches by the Orientalists, improvement in the means of communication, the influence of movements in various parts of Europe towards reconstruction of government and society on the models of nationalism and democracy and the flare up against, what Aurobindo described as 'the pox of Indigoism'—all these helped to impart a new character to the political thought and movement of the post-mutiny years. Under its impact the advanced among the political thinkers, unlike the leaders of the preceding generation, refused to regard a scheme of administrative reform as adequate enough. As Surendranath Banerjea wrote: The efforts of the last few years had stirred a strange and hitherto unfelt awakening among our people, and had created new hopes and aspirations. It was not enough that we should have our full share of the higher offices, but we aspired to have a voice in the councils of the nation<sup>48</sup>. Dr. B. B. Majumdar ascribes this new outlook to "the rise of the national-democratic school of political thought in Bengal in the sixth decade of the 19th century"<sup>49</sup>. It is possible to discern two distinct approaches in regard to contemporary political thought: (1) *The National-Democratic School* advocating the reconstruction of government and society in accordance with the principles of nationalism and democracy, a school to which belonged such stalwarts as Raj Narain Bose, Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan and Sisir Kumar Ghosh and (2) *The National School* which welcomed reconstruction on the model of nationalism, but was not prepared to concede the demands of democracy as being 'unrealistic' in the context of the vast illiterate mass in the country's population. The chief among the sponsors of this school of thought were Nabagopal Mitra, Akshay Chandra Sircar, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Rajendra Lal Mitra.

If the rise of an educated middle class—the product of the newly established universities—was the most remarkable feature in the social and cultural life of the country in the sixties of the last century, one of the most distinctive elements in the political thought of the sixties and seventies of the 19th century—an inevitable product of the new phenomenon—was the definite demand for a representative and responsible government or Home Rule, voiced among others by W. C. Bonnerjea, Ananda Mohan Bose and Kristodas Pal. The last-named wrote in an article in the *Hindu Patriot*: "Home Rule for India ought to be our cry, and it ought to be based upon the same constitutional basis that is recognised in the colonies."<sup>50</sup>

In the context of the change in the direction of increasingly progressive ideas held by the newly-sprung educated middle-class, need was felt for the formulation of a more representative political association. The British Indian Association had done and was still doing splendid service, but it was largely dominated by the well-placed and aristocratic elements. The desire for establishing a more representative, progressive



and central institution, linking up the educated middle-classes of Calcutta with those of the mofussil, led to the foundation of the *Indian League* on September 25, 1875.<sup>51</sup> The *Indian League* and the *Indian Association* founded on July 26, 1876 which followed and superseded the former as a more effective political organisation, mark the advent of a new phase in the evolution of political thought.

The primary objects of the Indian Association, as defined by Surendranath<sup>52</sup> were (1) the creation of a strong body of public opinion in the country ; (2) the unification of the Indian races and peoples under the basis of common political interests and aspiration ; (3) the promotion of friendly feeling between Hindus and Muhammedans and lastly (4) the inclusion of the masses in the great public movements of the day. In his opinion "The Indian Association supplied a real need. It soon focussed the public spirit of the middle class and became the centre of the leading representatives of the educated community of Bengal".<sup>53</sup> It roused to an unprecedented pitch the political feelings throughout the country over the issue of the age qualification of candidates at the I.C.S. Examination. It was important not only for what it was, but also for what it did. It strengthened the bond of unity bringing the people and provinces of the vast country to such close quarters as had never been experienced before. It did much to broaden the basis of political activities as well as the outlook from which they emanated. Prior to 1870 no sustained efforts were made with a view to organising public opinion on a large country-wide scale. Referring to pre-1870 politics wrote Bipin Chandra Pal : "Politics did not involve in those days any sufferings or sacrifices. The political authorities in the country did not take our infant political movement seriously. They saw no menace to their authority in it. The whole thing was more or less, a pastime, though certainly the more serious-minded of our youthful intellectuals did not consciously purpose it as such".<sup>54</sup> From after 1870's the influence of the educated middle-class began to be more increasingly and effectively manifest.

The progress in the direction of political ideas in Bengal of this period is linked up with the reaction caused by a series of unfortunate decisions of the Government of Lytton, and the equally, if not more unfortunate, reactions of the European communities against attempts at partial removal of discrimination in the matter of criminal law and justice. The Vernacular Press, the Arms and License Acts of 1878 on the one hand and the organised opposition of the Europeans to the Ilbert Bill (1882-1883) on the other, carrying it to excessive and even absurd lengths, did much to intensify political opposition of the Indians, as a whole, and of Bengal, in particular, to the demoralising nature of foreign rule. Another event, following in quick succession, viz. the incarceration of Surendranath (1883) on a charge of contempt of court, was yet another link in strengthening the bond of political unity.

To keep up with the trend of progress the Indian Association felt the urge of intensifying nationalist efforts on an all-India scale<sup>55</sup> and



accordingly convened an All-India National Conference, the first of its kind to be summoned till then (December 1883). Its object, as Surendra-nath explained, was "to bring the national forces, so to speak, into a focus; and if possible, to concentrate them upon some common object calculated to advance the public good."<sup>56</sup> Within a couple of years of the first session of the National Conference, the Indian National Congress, destined to outshine it, held its first session in Bombay (December 1885) with Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee as its President.

The sustained work put forth by the Indian Association for ten years at a stretch (1875-1885) towards the creation of a well-defined public opinion towards political questions and the unification of the Indian people on a common political platform facilitated the task of the promoters of the Indian National Congress. The unanimous election of W. C. Bonnerjee to the presidency of the first session of the Congress was partly a recognition of the role of Bengal in Indian politics. While in England, as early as 1867, young Bonnerjee addressed the East India Association, emphasizing the need of introducing "representative and responsible government" in India. Later in his Presidential address Mr. Bonnerjee anticipated the off-repeated British gibe of 'microscopic minority' and claimed for the Congress an entirely representative character. As *Times of India* (December 29, 1885) reported: "It was true, that judged from the standard of the House of Commons, they were not representatives of the people of India ..... But if community of sentiments, community of feelings and community of wants enable any one to speak on behalf of others, they were representatives of the people of India."

✓ A survey of the origin and working of the political ideas and associations in Bengal of the period 1837-1885 from the birth of the Zamindari Association to the rise of the Indian National Congress would reveal the continuous predominance of the western liberal thought. The leaders of the political thought of this period were but the intellectual children of the liberals of the west. They thought in terms of the permanence of the British rule; the ideal of national self-determination did not find whole-hearted acceptance with most of them. The concept of an India united on the secular foundations of economic and political interests no doubt appealed to their imagination, but it is doubtful if they fully grasped the philosophical and sociological implications of the concepts of liberty and equality. Their approach towards these concepts was however, more progressive than their political views. They propagated comparatively bold economic theories which carried them far ahead of the Western Liberal dogma of *Laissez-faire*. They freely advocated that it was clearly the duty of the government to extend protection to indigenous industries and to help, in as many ways as possible, all round economic development of the country.

Such a survey, in itself, is important in as far as it records the political activities in Bengal during a formative period of her history. But





more important still is an enquiry into the nature and trends of political ideas emanating from representative thinkers of the age and destined to leave indelible impression on the succeeding years. Between 1885 and 1905 political thought and theories in Bengal and of India underwent a remarkable transformation. Much effort and the effort of many contributed to the growth of a new outlook, conveniently described as the New Spirit. Curiously enough, the background of this changed outlook was, in the main, the work of one who was not actively associated with political movements. He was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), by profession a government employee and by conviction a free-thinker and political philosopher. Without denying or belittling the importance of the contributions of the generation belonging to half a century that intervened between the death of Ram Mohan Roy (1833) and the birth of the Indian National Congress (1885), it is possible to claim that no one had helped to bring about a transformation in the political, intellectual and spiritual outlook of his countrymen more deeply and decisively than Bankim Chandra. In the Bengal that he lived in, the prevalent political spirit was based on a somewhat servilely English model.<sup>57</sup> Leaders of those days could not think beyond representative assemblies and Legislative Councils. But politics had outgrown that stage. Need was felt for a programme bolder and more radical than the Anglocentric one hitherto pursued on the model of gradual constitutional progress. A bold programme can emanate from a bold thought and it is to the formulation of this thought that Bankim rendered the most distinctive contribution. He provided awakening and stimulating influence for the national mind. He gave to nationalism an inspiring slogan and to nationalists a militant programme and an unblurred vision. The leaders of the Indian political thought, beginning with Ram Mohan, found in the west their main, though not exclusive source of inspiration. It is not surprising, as such, that the earlier political efforts should have been directed towards reconstructing society and government in accordance with theories propagated by the Liberal school of the west. But with Bankim regarded as 'the greatest figure of the second phase of the Bengal Renaissance,'<sup>58</sup> dates the dawn of a new consciousness which was not content with merely thinking in terms of imitating the west, but attempted to discover and re-interpret our own past heritage and to effect a synthesis between the East and the West, thereby providing Indian thought-movement with a foundation not entirely borrowed from extraneous sources, but solid and stable on account of the roots going deep into her own forgotten but splendid past. One of the first two graduates of the Calcutta University, Bankim came into close contact with the master-minds of the western political thought—Bacon, Rousseau, Kant, Hume, Bentham, Mill, Darwin and Comte, besides others. We are told by the author of *Bankim-Prasanga*<sup>59</sup> that he continued the habit of diligent and sustained study even after he started on his career as a government official. He thus came to imbibe the very best that the modern



western political discourses as well as the ancient Indian political philosophy were capable of imparting—leading to a blending between Rationalism and reverence for India's past. It is possible to discover in his writings<sup>60</sup> the influence, to some extent, of utilitarianism propounded by Bentham and Mill, or of Comte's exposition of Religion of Humanity. But Bankim's thinking was by no means tied to the moorings of western political philosophy. His deep study of the ancient literature opened out to him the vision of a new and, what he was convinced, a better and more pervasive region of thought and ideology. The teachings of *Gita* moulded his outlook and convictions more powerfully than the exposition of western philosophers. His zeal for the concept of *Lokasamgraha* as elucidated in the *Gita* took him far beyond the scope of Benthamite philosophy. He carried the doctrine of *manusyapriti* to a much higher plane than the ideal of 'the greatest good for the greatest number' could possibly reach. In his view love of humanity was synonymous with devotion to God.

Bankim's stress on *Dharma*, as he understood it, led him to lay emphasis on the role of society or community in the life of a people. Community, and not government, in his opinion, was the real law-giver and protector. As such, he was unwilling to place much value on efforts towards political reform without first invigorating the people with a sense of loyalty to community and love of fellow-men. He had little or no faith in government as an agency for promoting general welfare. He had little sympathy or support for political agitation as carried on by a few educated men on western technique. He felt that social sentiment, roused and organised through an appeal to reason and conscience of the individual, was far more important than compulsion by law enforced through governmental machinery. The victim of his attack was not the government so much as the frailties and defects of his own countrymen. His numerous essays published in the *Banga-darshan* (1873-1875) show clearly that the unlettered mass of his countrymen and not the educated few were the objects of his deep interest.<sup>61</sup> He felt unhappy about the widening gulf between the western-educated few and the unlettered millions in the country. He did not spare the Babus<sup>62</sup> who, completely oblivious of the grave social and economic tensions threatening the integrity and organic unity of the society, lived apart, in a care-free manner, in a world of their own. He was convinced that no good could result from approaching the ruling authorities with the beggar's bowl. The moderate policy of mendicancy was ridiculed and mercilessly exposed by him in *Loka-rahasya*.<sup>63</sup> Nor did he believe that abuse of the English any how was the highest form of politics. He wanted his countrymen to rely more on their own power and less on the favour of the ruling class.

It need not, however, be supposed that Bankim singled out the lapses of his countrymen as solely responsible for their sufferings and degradation. He was painfully conscious of the basic evils of foreign rule, even though he was aware of some practical benefits conferred by



the British on India.<sup>64</sup> He condemned the imperial arrogance of the British and the deadweight of bureaucracy under which the country was supposed to be governed.<sup>65</sup> That he had no illusions about the British Raj is also evident from his comic discourse on Bransonism composed in the days of Ilbert Bill controversy.<sup>66</sup>

It is hardly a profitable speculation to ask if Bankim was a politician in the accepted sense of the term; obviously he was more than that. An enquiry as to what extent he followed the views of Mill, Bentham, Comte and other western political philosophers in so far as his concept of liberty, individual rights, relation between individual and community, nature and scope of functions of state and Religion are concerned, can be little more than an academic excursion. It is idle for critics to suggest that his pilgrimage was a retrograde step from the heights of socialism to the valley of nationalism. It is futile and unbalanced judgment to dub him as a Hindu reactionary or *laudator temporis acti*.

But it is necessary to examine at least one important aspect of Bankim's philosophy in so far as it relates to patriotism. It has been claimed that his greatest achievement was that he raised patriotism to the status and dignity of a religion—'the religion of patriotism' as Aurobindo describes it. Dr. R. C. Majumdar echoes the sentiment as he claims that Bankim converted 'patriotism into religion and religion into patriotism'.<sup>67</sup> It would be doing Bankim less justice than he deserves if we accept the suggestion that with him patriotism and religion were synonymous. His love for his country was a partial manifestation of his zeal for an all-pervasive love of humanity which transcended all artificial barriers of race and geography. Bankim, as such, was more a humanist than a patriot. He viewed with grave concern the cult of patriotism as practised in the west and was by no means agreeable to its importation to India.<sup>68</sup> There was nothing parochial about him or his views. The best Dharma, according to him, was undoubtedly love for all animate beings, but as this is difficult to practise on account of the imperfect state of human civilisation, *swadesh-priti* should be accepted as the highest possible religion.<sup>69</sup>

To many Bankim was the apostle of neo-Hinduism and the source of religious revivalism. Such views are but half truths and hence misleading. Others have sought in his writings the source and justification of militant nationalism or political extremism. Writing in 1907 Aurobindo described him as 'the inspirer and political guru' of 'the new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence'.<sup>70</sup> While it is to be admitted that Aurobindo and his compatriots were largely influenced by their understanding of Bankim's image of Anandamath, there were, as shown by Dr. Amallesh Tripathi, in an illuminating article,<sup>71</sup> striking differences between Bankim's philosophy and the cult of the Extremists and that 'the idea of Anandamath with its temple of Mother got mixed up with the idea of Bhavani, the patron-saint of Shivaji, and perhaps with Parthenon, the temple of Athena, for whom the Athenians fought against the Persians.'



Leaving apart the Extremists, the *Bande Mataram* song, now justifiably a national song of India, had an irresistible appeal for all. Through that immortal song, sustained by a rich imagery, Bankim held up the vision and shape of a great Divine and Material power, robed in ennobling beauty, full of majesty, grace and power which not only captured the imagination of his countrymen but made ineffaceable impression on their minds and thoughts and taught them to worship the motherland as a permanent deity of national adoration.

Commenting on the tremendous transformation accomplished by this song in the attitude and thought of the people, Aurobindo wrote in the issue of *Bandematram* dated April 16, 1907 :

"It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened ; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment some body sang *Bande Mataram*. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision had come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no further slumber till the temple had been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror."<sup>72</sup>

While Bankim's ideology has been interpreted in different ways<sup>73</sup> and almost all conceivable labels from communalism to socialism have been requisitioned for the purpose, it is heartening, in the midst of murmurs of criticism, faltering with doubts and hesitation, to listen to the high-pitched voice of certainty—the voice of one who initiated himself and hundreds of others in the *mantram* of *Bandemataram* :

"As when posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a peace-hunting politician nor the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does, and, just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, was able to create a language, a literature and a nation".<sup>74</sup>

The seeds of neo-politics based on nationalism sown by Bankim-chandra found in Bengal of the latter half of the 19th century a congenial soil and were, before long, impregnated with the ideal of spirituality by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) who, like his senior contemporary, without being a political figure, had to his credit, remarkable contribution to the growth and development of political consciousness and national awakening among his countrymen. A high-priest of national resurgence, a prophet of the socialist order, dedicated to the service of the low and the down-trodden and a vehement denouncer of the politics of beggary, the great Humanist and Vedantist missionary was the source of inspiration to many active workers in the political field. One is not likely to



accept the suggestion that 'the Swamiji's primary motivation was the uplift of the masses and that to achieve this he had once sought to form a revolutionary group to overthrow foreign rule'.<sup>75</sup> But there will hardly be any hesitation in agreeing to the claim that Vivekananda was the fountain-head of aspiration for a new emphasis "on individualism, on persons, in his attempt to harness energism to their thoughts and activities."<sup>76</sup> More spontaneous still will be the acceptance of Romain Rolland's observation: "If the generation that followed, saw three years after Vivekananda's death, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi, if India today has definitely taken part in the collective action of organised masses, it is due to the initial shock, to the mighty Lazarus, Come forth! of the Message from Madras."<sup>77</sup>

The gospel of nationalism preached by Raj Narain Bose and sustained by his followers, the teachings of Bankim Chandra, the exhortations of Keshab Chandra Sen,<sup>78</sup> Swami Vivekananda, the rapidly growing abstract love of liberty, a passionate desire for freedom from bondage of all sorts,—social economic and political—and an innate hatred of foreign rule made their influence steadily felt on the minds of the ever-widening circle of Bengal intelligentsia from towards the close of the last century. It was a feat of noble gesture and an instance of supreme self-abnegation on the part of the sponsors of the Indian National Conference to have merged the Conference into the Indian National Congress which held its first session in Bombay almost immediately after the second session of the National Conference had been over in Calcutta. Soon, however, it became evident to the discerning political leaders of Bengal that the Congress held out little prospect of the fulfilment of their aspirations. It did not take them long to be disillusioned. The Congress appeared to them to be little more than an organ for petitioning the government or for drafting pious resolutions which were greeted with deliberate indifference on the part of the ruling authorities, as was clear from the lamentably inadequate reforms introduced in 1892. It also seemed to them that the Congress made little or no efforts to develop mass contact to the extent that was desirable. Such attitude and activities (or rather lack of activities) came as a rude shock and disappointment to the widely-awakened political conscience of Bengal with a much older record of political ideas and activities to its credit. It is, as such, little surprising that Aswini Kumar Datta of Barisal condemned the Congress session of 1897 as a "three days' *tamasha*." More vehement still had been the attack hurled earlier by Sri Aurobindo in the columns of *Indu Prakash*.<sup>79</sup> "The Congress in Bengal" he wrote, "is dying of consumption; annually its proportions sink into greater insignificance, its leaders, the Bonerjis and Banerjis and Lal Mohon Ghoshes have climbed into the rarefied atmosphere of the Legislative Council and lost all hold on the imagination of the young men. The desire for a nobler and more inspiring patriotism is growing more intense."



Apart from Aswini Kumar and Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak too drew pointed attention to the need of supplanting the beggarly attitude hitherto indulged in by a bold, assertive and radical programme with the object of attaining *Swaraj* or self-government. And very soon Bengal and Maharashtra were drawn inseparably closer together by ties of common political outlook and aspirations.

In its early years extending over two decades since its inception the Congress broke no new grounds. Its leaders clung to prayer and petition as remedies or for the solution of their grievances. By and large, they could think of no radical or fundamental deviation from the frame-work of the British Indian administration. With the exception of a limited few, they were unable to grasp the basic clash of economic interests between alien rule and nationalist aspirations. Referring to the year 1887 wrote Bipin Chandra Pal: "We all believed that England was conscientiously and deliberately working for the political emancipation of India. We believed that she would take us up by the hand and gradually set us in our proper place among the nations of the world. We believed that by the gradual expansion of the principles and organisation of self-government, that had been introduced by Lord Ripon, by the reform and expansion of the Legislative Councils, by the introduction of large number of people of this country into our public services, by opening out to us the gates of the military services, by granting us the charter of free citizenship and investing us with the right of organising national militia,—we hope, we believed in 1887, that by these means England would gradually train us up to become a free nation and take our place among the free states of the world ..... and we believed that if only we depended on England for our political emancipation, followed her guidance, accepted her discipline, placed ourselves in her hands for our training, then the day would come when under her guidance, and with her help, we would be able to realise our highest, noblest and deepest political aspirations and be a free nation among the nations of the world." As late as 1902, as President of the Indian National Congress Surendranath Banerjea proclaimed: "We plead for the permanence of British rule in India." He emphasised the constitutional nature of the movement sponsored by the Congress and said, "In the constitutional struggle in which we are engaged, we need the co-operation of Englishmen and the sympathies of civilised mankind. It is England which had created in us those political aspirations, the fruition of which we now claim ..... we have no higher aspiration than that we should be admitted into the great confederacy of self-governing states, of which England is the august mother. We recognise that the journey towards the destined goal must necessarily be slow and the blessed consummation can only be attained after prolonged preparation and laborious apprenticeship."<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of their political creed would show that what they were interested in was the fulfilment of four basic political demands which may be summarised as "(1) Indianisation of the services ; (2) expansion of



Legislative Councils ; (3) removal of restrictions on the press and (4) the extension of the rule of law by taking such steps as the separation of the judiciary from the executive."<sup>82</sup>

Apart from holding comparatively circumscribed political views inherent in implicit faith in British Liberalism, the leaders of the early Congress were also averse to discussion of matters which, in their opinion, were not of an all-India character. To redress these deficiencies, the leaders of the progressive political ideas and movements in Bengal intensified their efforts through provincial conferences. Since 1895 such conferences were regularly held in the district head-quarters, so as to bring the leaders and the masses closer together. In 1897 the third session of the Bengal Provincial Conference, held at Nator, took a momentous step by deciding to change the medium of speeches and discussions from English to Bengali. The important decision, calculated to give the conference an increasingly representative and popular character, enabling a larger number of people to participate in its deliberations, was primarily the work of Rabindranath Tagore.

Like Bankim, Rabindranath wielded his pen with a view to stimulating national resurgence. Like him he contributed immensely to the political awakening of his countrymen without identifying himself with any group of active political participants. A versatile genius is invariably greeted with acclamation which often takes the shape of a general or even sweeping adoration. It is not unoften uncritical and, on account of this, is incapable of properly isolating and emphasising the separate trends which go to the making of an integrated personality. In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that our adoration for the poet and the creative artist has blinded us to the need and importance of enquiring into the extent to which Rabindranath's political ideas have entered into the consciousness of the Indian intelligentsia. This is not the place to investigate in details into the stages of the evolution of Tagore's political philosophy. But so far as our period is concerned, it is necessary to emphasise some general trends of his political ideas. Tagore placed the greatest emphasis on the dignity, freedom and equality of the individual, but at the same time emphasised the obligation of the individual to the society of which he is an integral part. He was consistently inclined to invest sovereignty in society rather than in state. He upheld the view that the government which governs the least is of all governments the best. He made vehement attacks on the reactionary policy of the government and the attitude of the white arrogance from which it proceeded. He accepted the western concept of democracy with its attendant principle of popular sovereignty, which Ranke describes as "the perpetually mobile ferment of the modern world", but took care to add to it the individual's obligation to serve the society. He was convinced that our political subjection was merely an outward expression of an inner or mental weakness. Self-reliance, he said, was the only effective means which could lead India to her destined goal. In his opinion it was far more desirable



that we should take out the weeds from our own field than wait and beg at the door of the rulers in England. Constructive nation-building services rather than political agitation would serve the interests of India better—he said.

The political efforts of the Provincial Conferences on the one hand and the sustained province-wide activities of the Indian Association in the social field on the other, kept alive the progressive character of the movement in Bengal. It found expression in a vigorous agitation conducted on behalf of the labour employed in the tea-gardens of Assam, exposed to the merciless exploitation of the plantation-owners. Journals and periodicals like *Bangadarshan*, *Sadharani*, *Bandhab*, *Samadarshi*, *Bharati*, *Sanjibani*, *Hitavadi*, *Sadhana*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *New India* and *Bande Mataram* carried the message of political, social and economic liberation to the doors of the general public.

Slowly but steadily in Bengal the unappeased political aspirations of the progressive school led to the formulation of a new and well-defined approach called by the name of the New Spirit. It was based on the gospel of self-help and self-reliance eloquently expressed by Rabindranath in his famous discourse on *Swadeshi Samaj*. "Let our rulers govern our country in their own way", he wrote, "but we must stand on our own legs and do things ourselves according to our choice and needs."<sup>83</sup> Bipin chandra Pal claimed that 'it called out the spirit of India to come to its own, to stand upon its inner strength and to put forth its native efforts for the realisation of its true native life.'<sup>84</sup>

In its broader aspects, the New Spirit implied the rejection of the old-style mendicant methods of prayer, protest and petition, the grant of *Swaraj* or independence which alone could mean the fulfilment of the nationalist aspirations of the people, reorganisation of education on national lines, the adoption of an economic programme based on the boycott of British and other foreign goods and the promotion of Swadeshi articles. Its political technique was that of Passive Resistance. In elucidating this technique Bipin Chandra wrote: "If you ask me to state in general terms what are the methods and the means, what are the instruments that will further this ideal of Swaraj in this country, my reply shall be that these means and methods are included under what is known in political science as the methods of Passive Resistance. It means not resistance that is not active but resistance that is not aggressive. Passive resistance is not non-active but non-aggressive resistance. We stand within the limits of the law that we have still in the country. We shall respect that law as long as the law shall respect our primary rights which constitute the authority of every government—whether that government be a despotic government or constitutional government—rights which no government can create and which therefore no government can destroy. As long as the laws of the government shall respect our primary rights of all life and person, of property and similar primary rights, so long we propose ourselves to be within the bounds of law ; and passive resis-



tance means resistance offered by a people from within the limits of such a law."<sup>85</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, another exponent of this technique, explained its main features as follows: 'The first principle of passive resistance, which the new school have placed in the forefront of their programme, is to make administration under present conditions impossible by an organised refusal to do anything which shall help either British commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it—unless and until the conditions are changed in the manner and to the extent demanded by the people . . . . We are dissatisfied with the fiscal and economical conditions of British rule in India, with the foreign exploitation of the country, the continual bleeding of its resources, the chronic famine and rapid impoverishment which result, the refusal of the Government to protect the people and their industries . . . . We are dissatisfied also with the conditions under which education is imparted in this country, its calculated poverty and insufficiency, its anti-national character, its subordination to the Government and the use made of that subordination for the discouragement of patriotism and the inculcation of loyalty.'<sup>86</sup>

In referring to Sri Aurobindo's discourse on Passive Resistance which appeared in the columns of *Bande Mataram* in April 1907 we are obviously guilty of over-stepping the limits and scope of this chapter. Our purpose in tracing down to 1907 the trends of the New Thought as reflected in the writings of Bipin Chandra, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath, among others, is to emphasise that the New Spirit was more than a mere counter-challenge to the specific Curzonian move in regard to the partition of Bengal. Just when theory and practice alike seemed to presage a new path and programme, came, largely to block its fulfilment, the challenge of imperialist reaction. The New Thought was more than a reply to that ill-conceived, sinister move of British imperialism. It had a much earlier beginning. It was but the consummation of an outlook and programme which had its origin in the radical transformation of thought-pattern initiated, in general accord with the genius of the people and the tradition of the country, by Bankim Chandra and Swami Vivekananda (to name the most outstanding among the authors of this transformation). Since the thirties of the last century the intellectuals had begun to see the vision of a new horizon promising the dawn of liberalism and constitutional reforms. In the sixties and seventies their thoughts attained maturity within the pattern of western liberal ideology. The eighties and nineties saw radical transformation of political ideas and ideals, the liberation from the fetters which half a century of liberalism had imposed and the birth of a refreshingly vigorous outlook based on the ideals of self-reliance, 'religion of patriotism', *Swaraj* and the overthrow of all sources of extraneous interference, political, social and economic.

It will amount to a denial of historical justice to characterise the new outlook as a mere phase of Hindu Revivalism or Traditionalism. It is of



course possible to detect elements of weakness in the new cult. Its political philosophy made its adherents ardent advocates of the doctrine of political equality without making of them whole-hearted converts to the complementary doctrine of economic equality with all its logical implications. Their disapproval of the glaring economic disparities and of exploitation of man by man was little more than theoretical, for socialism, as conceived by them, was partly an academic approach, partly a sentimental attitude. The criticism that "their ideals did not form a consistent whole; they were never logically worked out as a systematic political thought. Often they varied from one individual to another and in the case of some individuals from one period of time to another ..... They were absorbed in the immediate question of evolving a strategy and tactics for conducting political agitation with the purpose of attaining freedom from foreign domination"<sup>87</sup>—cannot be entirely refuted. On the whole, however, their positive contribution to the evolution of political ideas easily outweighs their limitations. Their philosophical defence of the right of national self-determination is a remarkable contribution to the development of political thought in the country. In 1905 Bengal pointed to an invigorating political doctrine, a dynamic programme and a glorious vision, which though largely deriving its inspiration from the past, was alive to the progressive tendencies of the age; but what is more important, was destined to contribute effectively to the fulfilment of India's aspiration at no very distant date in future.

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4. A. C. Banerjee: Political consciousness before 1857, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, Jadavpore, 1958, p. 139.
5. Raja Ram Mohan Roy: *English Works*, p. 784.
6. *Ibid*: p. 446.
7. *Ibid*: p. 268.
8. *Asiatic Journal*, December 1823, p. 581-583.
9. Raja Ram Mohon Roy, *English Works*, p. 464.
10. *Ibid*, p. 464.
11. *Ibid*, p. 266.
12. B. B. Majumdar, *History of Political Thought*, Vol. I, p. 41.
13. Raja Ram Mohan Roy: *Works*, p. 461.
14. B. B. Majumdar, *History of Political Thought*, Vol. I, p. 16.
15. *Works*, p. xxiii.
16. *Asiatic Intelligence*, April 1830.
17. Petition of Ram Mohan Roy to the Rt. Hon'ble Lord Minto, dated April 2, 1890.
18. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, *English Works*, p. 923.
19. "What!" replied he (upon being asked why he had celebrated by illuminations, by an elegant dinner . . . . and by a speech composed and delivered in English by himself . . . on the arrival of important news of the success



of the Spanish patriots), "Ought I to be insensible to the suffering of my fellow-creatures wherever they are, or however connected by interests, religious or language? *Edinburg Magazine*, September 1823.

20. Quoted in *Modern Review*, October 1929.
21. Quoted in B. B. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 79.
22. B. B. Majumdar, op. cit. p. 85. The following couplets occur in the poem :  
"Land of the Gods and lofty name ;  
Land of the fair and beauty's spell.  
Land of the bards of might fame,  
My native land! for e'er farewell".
23. Jan. 5, 1835.
24. July 10, 1838.
25. July 5, 1835.
26. Quoted from *India Gazette*, April 12, 1833 in B. B. Majumdar, op. cit. p. 100-101.
27. B. B. Majumdar, p. 123....A correspondent's Report on the speech appearing in the *Bengal Harukara* (Feb. 13, 1843) is reproduced in *Awakening in Bengal*, Vol. I, edited by Gautam Chattopadhyay, p. 389-399.
28. *Calcutta Review*, July—December, 1846, quoted by B. B. Majumdar, op. cit. p. 211.
29. B. B. Majumdar (op. cit., F.N. p. 114) draws attention to an article signed by 'K' (apparently Krishnamohan Banerjee) published in the *Bengal Spectator*, 1842 wherein the writer put up a convincing case for opening judicial and fiscal offices to competitive examinations.
30. Even a leader like Raj Narain Bose, 'the pedagogue of Midnapore', widely respected for his sober judgment, speaking of the Derozians wrote, "The light from the west had turned their heads."
31. Opinion of the Derozians on the question of European colonisation in India was really divided. See *The History and Culture of the Indian people*, Vol. X, Part II, p. 439.
32. An article of which the extract quoted below forms a part deserves more than a cursory notice (quoted in B. B. Majumdar—op. cit. p. 90-91). "The Government of India (under the English) is purely aristocratical; the people have no voice in the council of legislature; they have no hand in framing the laws which regulate their civil conduct. We need not expatiate on the monopoly of the state service, the law's delay, the insolence of office, the heavy expenses of Government, the retirement from India of all those who acquire wealth, and the enormous taxation to which the country is subjected—evils too well-known in India . . . . The violent means by which foreign supremacy has been established, and the entire alienation of the people of the soil from any share in the government, nay, even from all offices of trust and power, are circumstances which no commercial, no political benefits can authorise or justify."
33. B. B. Majumdar, op. cit. p. 79.
34. "Many of Young Bengal's true limitations were not peculiarly its own but shared by our entire Renaissance. The educated community of the 19th century failed to understand the exploiting character of the alien British rule in India, looking mainly at its immediate benefits; the protagonists of our 'awakening', had little contact with or understanding of the toiling masses who lived in a world apart; the obsession with Hindu traditions and life kept at a distance the community of our Muslim fellow-citizens. Such aspects of our Renaissance heritage have seriously handicapped the democratic progress of the country." S. C. Sarkar, *Derozio and Young Bengal, Studies in Bengal Renaissance*, Jadavpore 1958, p. 30-31.
35. R. C. Majumdar, *History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. X, Part II, p. 444. For a detailed study of the discussions held under the auspices



- of the Association, on topics of political interest see B. N. Banerjee, *Samvad Patre Sekaler Katha*, Vol. II, pp. 398-405.
36. B. B. Majumdar *Op. Cit.* p. 163.
  37. Quoted in C.F. Andrews and Girija Mukherjee—*The Rise and Growth of the Congress*, p. 22.
  38. Quoted in B. B. Majumdar, *Op. cit.* p. 164.
  39. *Ibid*, Foot-Note, p. 165.
  40. *Ibid*, p. 172.
  41. B. N. Banerjee, *Samvad Patre Sekaler Katha*, Vol. II, p. 761-762.
  42. 'The two Presidency Associations of Bombay and Madras were established mainly through the British Indian Association. Soon after its foundation, the British Indian Association in order to secure national support for its petition to Parliament on the occasion of the renewal of the E.I.Co's charter sought to enlist the cooperation of the leading citizens of Bombay and Madras, and to induce them to establish similar organisations, to work as branch societies of the parent body in Calcutta. Thus the initiative of the British Indian Association led to the establishment of the two Presidency Associations with exactly similar objects and rules. But also the Presidency Association of Bombay and Madras agreed to work in close cooperation with the British Indian Association and to lend full support to the latter's petition to Parliament, they refused to be affiliated as Branch Societies and insisted on maintaining their independent status. This was not taken by the British Indian Association with a bad grace.'—Sujata Ghosh, *Bengal Past & Present*, Vol. 77, Part II, Serial No. 144.
  43. Quoted in Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha—D. K. Biswas, *Studies in Bengal Renaissance*, Jadavpur, 1958, p. 45.
  44. Soumyendranath Tagore, Evolution of Swadeshi Thought, *Studies in Bengal Renaissance*, Jadavpore, 1958, p. 208.
  45. A. C. Majumdar, *Indian National Evolution*, p. 7.
  46. *Indian Nationalism : Principles and Personalities*, p. 94.
  47. Sir Charles Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India* (1838) p. 197.
  48. *A Nation in Making*, Calcutta 1964, p. 62.
  49. *History of Political Thought*, Vol. I, 124.
  50. Quoted in *History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. X, Part II, Bombay, 1965, p. 500.
  51. C. H. Heimsath's observation (*Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* p. 64) that 'the Indian League was the first political body in India to seek more than casual ties with political groups outside the province' does scant justice to the outlook and activities of the Indian Association.
  52. *A Nation in Making*, Calcutta 1964, p. 39.
  53. *Ibid*, p. 42.
  54. *Memories of My Life and Times*, Calcutta 1932, 1951, p. 234-235.
  55. In a speech delivered in pre-congress days Surendranath said : 'Is India's greatness possible unless we are thoroughly welded together into a compact mass? . . . . And the whole of India comes to be bound in this treble chain of love, sympathy and esteem, the day of India's greatness would not be distant.', *Speeches*, p. 2-3.
  56. Quoted by J. C. Bagal—*History of the Indian Association*, p. 81.
  57. Sri Aurobindo, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, p. 7.
  58. S. C. Sengupta, Bankim Chandra, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, Jadavpore, p. 69.
  59. p. 216.
  60. Dharmatattva, Chap. VIII, *Saririki Vritti*, Chap. XXII, *Atmapriti*, Vividhaprabandha, Part II, *Chittasuddhi*.
  61. Vividha-prabandha, *Bangadesher Krisak O Lokasiksha*.





62. Lokarahasya—*Igraj-stotra*; Babu.
63. Kamalakanter Patra 2—*Politics*.
64. Vividha-prabandha—*Bharatvarsher Swadhinata O Paradhinata*.
65. Vividha-prabandha—*Bangla Sasaner Kal*.
66. Lokarahasya.
67. Genesis of Extremism : *Studies in Bengal Renaissance*, Jadavpore, 1958, p. 189.
68. Vividha-prabandha—*Bharat-kalanka; Dharmatattva*, Champ. XXIV, *Swadesh-priti*.
69. Dharmatattva, Chaps. XXIV, XXVIII.
70. Bandemataram, April 16, 1907.
71. Bankimchandra and Extremist Thought—*Bengal Past & Present*, Vol. 84, Part II (1964) and Vol. 85, Part I (1965).
72. Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda, Pondicherry, 1955.
73. A suggestion has been offered to the effect that Bankim's political philosophy which found its first expression through discourses on 'Samya, communism and the political philosophy of the founders of the First International', at a later stage, underwent a sort of transformation when he veered round the theory that the liberation of the country could be accomplished by a 'puritanically trained and secretly armed guerilla band' only (Sri Gopal Halder, *Revolutionary Terrorism, Studies in Bengal Renaissance*, p. 231). Such a suggestion presupposes Bankim's acquaintance with the teachings Karl Marx whose *Das Kapital* was not translated into English when Bankim wrote his discourse on Samya and takes for granted what may be termed at best a hypothesis, by no means proved, that the author of *Anandamath* was out to prove that the country's liberation could be effected by a chosen band of selfless workers alone.
74. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, p. 41.
75. Bhupendranath Datta, *Swami Vivekananda Patriot and Prophet*, pp. viii-ix.
76. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Social Philosophy of Ramkrishna and Vivekananda*, *Calcutta Review*, 1954.
77. Romain Rolland—*The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 125.
78. Keshub Chunder Sen was not a political propagandist; but his personal indictment of certain moral results of British rule, particularly in regard to temperance, which he brought before crowded English audiences during his visit to the country, reacted upon India and helped to a large extent to undermine the superior moral plea upon which the British rulers of the country sought to justify their position."—Bipin Chandra Pal, *Writings and Speeches*, p. 174.
79. Published from Bombay serially from July 16 to August 27, 1894 and reproduced in Sri Aurobindo—*Bankim Chandra Chatterjee*, p. 38.
80. *Swadeshi and Swaraj*—*The New Movement*, p. 124-127.
81. G. A. Natesan (ed.), *Indian National Congress*, p. 705.
82. K. P. Karunakaran (ed.), *Modern Indian Political Tradition*, Introduction, Delhi, p. 12.
83. Rabindranath—*Swadeshi Samaj*, 1904 (Rachanavali, Vol. III).
84. *Character Sketches*—Sri Aravinda Ghosh, p. 88.
85. Quoted in *The Life and Work of Lal, Bal and Pal*, p. 245.
86. *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 36.
87. K. P. Karunakara (Ed.), *Op. Cit.* Introduction p. 18.



## THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT (1833-1905)

### I. No Nationalism in Bengal in 1833

National movement in a country presupposes the existence of nationalism among its people. It is not easy to define nationalism, but perhaps not very difficult to specify some essential features without which a group of people cannot be conceived as constituting a nation. The first of these is a conscious desire among this group of peoples to live together under one and the same Government, which is uncontrolled by an outside authority. The second is the existence of a degree of sympathy and fellow-feeling among the persons belonging to the group, such as does not exist between this group or any constituent part of it on the one hand, and any other group of people which willingly forms part of another nation. It follows as a corollary that each constituent of the group forming a nation is more willing to co-operate with other constituents or the group as a whole than with any other group of people forming part of another nation. The third is a common home, in other words, co-residence of the group of persons in a specified and well-defined geographical territory.

Fulfilment of these conditions is usually brought about by many factors, such as community of race, language, religion, culture and historical tradition, and is also in some cases facilitated by common political and economic interests, and common subjection to the same ruling authority for a long time. But while all these are important basic factors which not unoften lead to the rise of a nation, none of them may be regarded as essential features without which we cannot conceive of a nationality. There are nations whose people do not all belong to the same race, or speak the same language, or profess the same religion, and so on. So these are merely subsidiary, unlike the three conditions mentioned above which underlie the conception of a nationality.

Judged by this standard, was there an Indian nation in 1833? The answer can only be in the negative. There was no fellow-feeling among the peoples of different parts of British India. In the eighteenth century the Marathas oppressed the Bengalis and the Rajputs such as no European power ever did. Bishop Heber, a contemporary writer, informs us that in the eyes of a man of Hindustan or Upper India, a Bengali was as much a foreigner as an Englishman. The people of India regarded themselves as Bengali, Hindusthani, Punjabi, Maratha, etc., and not as an Indian. The Bengali leaders, including Raja Rammohan Roy, offered prayers to God for the success of the British in their fight against other Indian powers.

Next, the question arises whether there was a national feeling among the peoples of any particular region, speaking the same language. So



far as Bengal is concerned the answer must again be in the negative. The reasons for such conclusion are not so obvious as in the case of India, and therefore require some explanation.

In 1833 the population of Bengal consisted of two main elements, namely, Hindus and Muslims. Though living together in the same land they differed in almost everything except language. In religion, education and social and cultural life, they lived in almost two different worlds for more than six hundred years. Not only that, the Muslims wounded the most cherished ideas and sacred sentiments of the Hindus by their iconoclastic zeal and trampled on their civil and political rights throughout this period. So much so, that even leading citizens of Bengal like Rammohan Roy, Dwaraka Nath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore looked upon the Muslims as the source of the evils and indignities which the Hindus suffered for nine hundred years, and looked upon the British rule as a divine dispensation for freeing the Hindus from the yoke of the Muslims. Bengali literature, including periodicals, referred to the Muslims as *Yavana*,—most of whom were low class Hindu converts—and regarded them as a distinct and separate unit from the Hindus. This was further emphasized by the new political situation created by the British conquest of Bengal. As stated above, the Hindus of Bengal looked upon the British as friends and benefactors, while the Muslims naturally cherished feelings of bitter hatred against the British who deprived them of their sovereignty and the wealth, power and prestige which flowed from it. Further, they could ill brook the idea that the Hindus who had been their slaves for hundreds of years now occupied an equal, or in some respects even a superior, position. It is hardly reasonable to expect that in these circumstances there would exist a feeling of fraternity between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal, or that they would easily develop an attitude towards each other which is favourable to the conception of a common nationality, as defined above.

There was a further difference between the two communities. To the Hindus the British rule meant merely a change of masters, and it was they felt, a change for the better. They had, therefore, no immediate incentive to an improvement in political status. The case was entirely different with the Muslims. The Islamic empire in India as well as the Muslim rule in Bengal was then almost a living reality and they still smarted under the grievous loss so recently suffered by them. They were naturally eager to make a last effort to recover their lost power and prestige.

## II. MUSLIM NATIONALISM

While all this feeling widened the gulf between the two communities, it developed a strong patriotic and national feeling among the Muslims. They possessed some of the essential elements of nationality which the Hindus lacked. They had a common politico-religious ideal namely to



establish a *Dar-ul-Islam* (Islamic State) in place of *Dar-ul-harb* (State under non-Muslims) by driving away the British, for, according to strict injunctions of Islam, a Muslim could not perform all the religious ceremonies in a state under non-Muslim rule. The Muslims all over India were bound by the strong ties of a common religion, a common language (Urdu and Persian), a common source of literary inspiration (Arabic and Persian), a common historical tradition of glory and prestige, and, above all, a real bond of fraternity as against Hindus. The Islamic fraternity in India was a reality, and could form the basis of nationality as defined above. As a consequence we find that whereas in most other respects the Hindus were more progressive than the Muslims, the latter developed a sense of nationalism much earlier than the former. It may be said in a general way, that while the Muslim nationality was developed during the first half of the nineteenth century, the Hindus did not show any definite sign of such development before the second half. The history of the national movement in Bengal may, therefore, be divided into two distinct phases—the Muslim national movement in Bengal which was an offshoot of a bigger movement extending over the whole of North India, and the Hindu national movement which originated in Bengal but soon extended its influence over the rest of India.

The Wahabi movement may be regarded as the first national movement in British India. It was, however, not an Indian, or even a Bengali national movement, it was an *Islamic* movement, pure and simple. Its object was to establish a *Dar-ul-Islam* in India. It was a revolt against all non-Muslims, and actually commenced with a fight against the Sikhs of the Punjab. When the British conquered this province the animosity of the Wahabis was directed against them. The Muslims could not make a common cause with the Hindus against the British,—for, at least theoretically, the movement was as much directed against the Hindus as against the British both alike being obstacles against the establishment of Muslim rule in India. But the Wahabis appealed for help to the Muslim states outside India for help and co-operation. This indicates the purely Islamic or rather the pan-Islamic character of the movement.

The Wahabi movement was started by Saiyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly (1786-1831) for religious reform, but it culminated in a struggle for driving away the British. Even before the movement took this form and assumed an all-India character, a similar movement was started in East Bengal, by Sariatullah. He, too, founded a sect, called Farazi, for religious reform, but later declared the country under British rule as *Dar-ul-harb* where Friday prayer could not be held. We read in a letter, published in the *Samachara-darpana* and signed by the "Sufferers of Dacca District", that Sariatullah, a Yavana (Muselman), desirous of obtaining sovereignty, recruited 12,000 followers and committed various atrocities on Hindus, in the districts of Dacca and Faridpur, by breaking their temples, slaughtering cows, burning and looting houses, etc. The writers expressed their fear that if things went on in this way, there would be an end of



Hinduism in that area. In spite of obvious exaggerations, the letter, which was published on 22 April, 1837, and written in the first week of that month, reveals the contemporary popular view in respect of (1) the great strength of the movement ; (2) its anti-Hindu or purely Muslim character ; and (3) its object viz., the establishment of Muslim rule. Sariatullah's son, Muhammad Mushin, generally known as Dudhu Mia (1819-60) organized the sect. He fixed his headquarters at Bahadurpur and divided East Bengal into a number of circles, each of which was in charge of a Khalifah who recruited members and levied contributions. The organisation was fairly effective. The Muslim peasants joined the sect in large number, and it was alleged that they were forced to do so on pain of excommunication. Dudhu Mia took upon himself the power of Government and not only administered justice but punished anybody who dared bring suits to ordinary courts of law. He declared that all the lands belonged to God and no one had the right to demand any taxes. Although the avowed object of the sect was the expulsion of the British, in reality the attacks were directed against landlords and indigo-planters, who were united against him and after repeated attempts at last secured his conviction in 1857. He was kept as a State prisoner in Alipore jail and died at Bahadurpur in 1860.

While Sariatullah was carrying on his activities in East Bengal, Wahabi doctrines were preached in Barasat (West Bengal) by Mir Nassir Ali, better known as Titu Mir or Titu Mia of Chandpur, a disciple of Saiyid Ahmad whom he had met at Mecca in 1822. Like Sariatullah he also gathered round him a considerable body of weavers (*jolas*) and other lower classes of Muslims (referred to as *Yavana*), and the letter referred to above describes him also as desirous of establishing Muslim rule. He also antagonized the *zamindars*, and the matter came to a crisis when one of these imposed a tax upon each of his tenants who belonged to the Wahabi sect, and collected it in a village called Purna. Titu erected a strong bamboo stockade around his stronghold of Narkulbaria in the Twenty-four Parganas, and collected some 500 of his followers who began *jihad*. The Wahabis marched on to Purna, murdered a Brahman priest, slaughtered two cows and sprinkled the blood on the Hindu temples, plundered the shops, insulted the Muslims who did not join their sect, and committed violent outrages on Hindu life, property and faith. They declared that the British *Raj* was over, and proclaimed their "sovereign power as the hereditary right of the Muhammadans which had unjustly been usurped by the Europeans." Similar activities were carried on by the *Maulavis*, as the followers of this sect were called, in several villages, without meeting any resistance. Nadia, 24-Parganas, and Faridpur practically lay at their mercy. A contingent of Calcutta militia, sent under Alexander to suppress the rebellion, was routed, the rebels under Ghulam Masum inflicting heavy casualties. The manager of the Hooghly Factory was taken prisoner with his family and was released only on the condition that "he would become a *Zimmi* and sow indigo for them



as rulers of India." Proclamations were issued by the rebels calling on the authorities and the *zamindars* to acknowledge their supremacy and supply them with provisions on their intended march. Well-equipped troops with artillery were deputed to chastise the rebels who were found drawn out on the plain of Narkulbaria. The rebels fought bravely, but could not stand against the trained British soldiers. Titu was killed in action, and his lieutenant, Ghulam Rasul, with 350 followers, was taken prisoner. Ghulam Rasul was later on sentenced to death, and 140 of his comrades were condemned to various terms of imprisonment. This took place in 1831. A vernacular newspaper in its issue of 14th January, 1832, includes the two following items in the list of important events during the preceding year (1831): 11th November—The Muslim followers of Titu Mir rose against the Government in Jessore, Krishnagore and the neighbourhood of Calcutta. They called themselves *Maulavis* and plunder seems to be their chief object. This Titu Mir is a disciple of Saiyid Ahmad who is reported to have been killed while creating disturbances in the kingdom of Ranjit Singh.

27th November—A regiment of infantry from Barrackpur and a body of cavalry from Calcutta and Dum Dum were sent against them. Titu Mir and about 80 or 90 of his men were killed and about 250 were sent as prisoners to Calcutta.

Titu Mir's achievements or activities were considered as much less grave than those of Sariatullah in the letter of the Dacca people referred to above. But there is no doubt that they roused the spirit and enthusiasm of the Bengali peasants which found an outlet in the Wahabi movement when it spread all over North India.

It is not necessary to describe at length the activities of the Wahabis outside Bengal, and of their strenuous fights against the British from their remote military camp at Sittana in the North-West Frontier Province. But a few points must be emphasized in the context of the study of nationalism. First, we must note the wonderful organization over an extensive region from the border of East Bengal, right across the whole of North India, to Sittana. The network of organization was so perfect that for years there was a continuous flow of men and money from Bengal (and other parts) to Sittana by eluding the constant vigilance of the British police. This was rendered possible by a regular collection of funds in the different parts of Bengal by agents appointed for the purpose, systematic training of recruits, and enthusiastic response from common men (among the Muslims) to the call of unity and sacrifice for the establishment of a *Dar-ul-Islam* in India. A series of rest-houses were organized all along the 2000 mile route, in charge of men outwardly engaged in various vocations but who were all trustworthy agents devoted to the supreme cause of the overthrow of British rule. Fresh recruits had to commit to memory the list of stages and mosques where they could safely put up and also the names of persons devoted to their cause.

Secondly, we have abundant testimony to the zeal and heroism of the



Wahabis in the evidence given before the tribunals set up for their trial by the Government in 1864 and 1866. Two such tribunals were set up at Malda and Rajmahal in 1870, and it is clear from the evidence given before them that a fair number was recruited from the Muslim cultivators of Bengal. Ibrahim Mandal was the leader in the districts of Malda, Rajshahi, Bogra, Rangpore, and Dinajpur, and collected large sums for the *Jihad* against the British. He held such a position in the Muslim community in Bengal that the Government found it very difficult to procure witnesses to testify to his public and wide-spread 'seditious' activities. Rafiq Mandal of Malda was another great leader whose zeal and devotion to the Wahabi cause became proverbial. When his son, Maulavi Amiruddin, was tried at Malda and sentenced to transportation for life with forfeiture of property, Rafiq embraced him as soon as the judgement was pronounced, and cried out : "My son, never forsake *Ameen Ruffadair*, keep firm to the faith".

In short, it is difficult to deny that a wave of national enthusiasm swept the Muslims off their feet. It may be a nascent type of nationalism in a crude form, but we can undoubtedly trace its essential elements in the Wahabi Movement. We find among the Muslim masses a wonderful sense of communal unity inspired by a desire to drive away the English and establish a Muslim rule, a spirit of self-sacrifice for the cause, and power to develop a well-knit organization for the achievement of the object—and all this on a massive scale of which there is no parallel in India in the nineteenth century. The germ of nationalism was certainly there, but it did neither sprout nor leave any trace behind as a legacy for inspiration to the future generations.<sup>1</sup>

### III. GROWTH OF INDIAN NATIONALISM—FIRST PHASE UPTO 1860.

While the Wahabis carried on their activities for establishing Muslim rule in India by waging war against the British, the stage was being set for the development of nationalism among the Hindus. It ran on entirely different lines. The new spirit was confined to a small intellectual class, and did not affect the common people in the least. Further, there was no desire to drive away the British, and establish the Hindu or Indian rule in its place. Even Raja Rammohan Roy was not inspired by any such idea, and a distinguished citizen like Prasannakumar Tagore openly proclaimed that if God offered him the choice between *Swaraj* and British rule, he would choose the latter without any hesitation. Nevertheless, the seeds of nationalism were sown by the impact of Western ideas which English education brought in its train. The notions of patriotism were first instilled into the minds of English-educated young men, notably the students of the Hindu College. They were not only inspired by the ideas of liberty which they found in plenty in English literature, but were also deeply moved by the recent examples of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, as well as the contemporary



revolutionary movements that swept Europe in 1830 and 1848. The first sign of this new spirit is seen in the open expression of patriotic sentiments which inspired young students. A notable example is furnished by Kashi Prasad Ghosh, a student of the Hindu College. He wrote a number of patriotic poems in one of which occur the following lines :

“Land of the Gods and lofty name ;  
Land of the fair and beauty’s spell ;  
Land of the bards of mighty fame,  
My native land ; for e’er farewell !”

Such a feeling was naturally accompanied by public expression of discontent against the British Government and demand for the improvement of political status. This is also found in the writings and utterances of the students of the Hindu College. They contain strong denunciations of the colonial rule of the European nations, including the English, and its injurious effects upon the native population. Evils of subjection to foreign rule were argued on abstract principles of equality of men and the true functions and objects of Government, as well as by citing actual instances of mal-administration by the British. It is evident that the love for the British rule which characterized the age of Rammohan was slowly passing away. Nevertheless, the younger generation fully realized that their dream of independence would remain a mere dream for many years to come. So Kashi Prasad wrote :

“But woe me ! I shall never live to behold,  
That day of thy triumph, when firmly and bold,  
Thou shalt mount on the wings of an eagle on high,  
To the region of knowledge and blest liberty”.

Thus though the English-educated youths cherished lofty ideals, their political activities did not extend beyond constitutional agitation, the foundation of which was laid by Raja Rammohan Roy. The spirited protest of the Raja and his colleagues against the Press Ordinance of 1823 and their appeal to the Supreme Court and the King, though unsuccessful in achieving their immediate object, set in motion a spirit of defiance which was fed fat by the discontent and disaffection generated by the abuses, real or fancied, of the British administration. The growth and development of this discontent and defiance are clearly seen in the writings of the vernacular newspapers which took a definite form and found ready response in the hearts of a steadily increasing number of persons.

The older generations, though strong advocates of British rule in India, were not blind to the patent defects in the British administration, and made demands for various reforms, such as improvement in the material condition, spread of education, both literary and technical,



among the people, introduction of trial by jury, admission of an increasing number of Indians to higher offices, grant of more powers of Indians in regard to legislation, and inclusion of a few Indian members in the British Parliament.

These ideas were at first preached by both the older and the younger generations through the press and on the platform. But need was soon felt for organised political agitation. As the political associations established for this purpose may be regarded as the first stage or foundation of nationalism, it is necessary to refer to them in some detail.

The oldest association of this kind was probably the *Bangabhasa-Prakasika Sabha* founded in 1836. But far more important was the Landholders' Society founded in 1837. It adopted, for the first time, the idea of setting up branch societies in every part of British India, and of enlisting the co-operation of the Englishmen who felt sympathy for the political aspirations of India. A memorable instance of such sympathy and co-operation is furnished by the speech delivered by Mr. Turton in a meeting of this Society held on 30th November, 1839, a passage from which is quoted below :

"It was not as a conquered nation that he desired to retain the inhabitants of India as British subjects, but as brethren in every respect ; as constituting a part of the Kingdom of Britain, as fellow subjects—with the same feelings, the same interests and objects, and the same rights as the British-born inhabitants of England. He admired the principle adopted of old by the Romans, of incorporating their conquests with Rome, and granting to the conquered the privileges of Roman citizen".<sup>2</sup>

The educated middle classes of Bengal founded the 'Bengal British India Society' on 20 April, 1843. Its object was defined to be "the collection and dissemination of information relating to the actual condition of the people of British India . . . and to employ such other means of a peaceable and lawful character as may appear calculated to secure the welfare, extend the just rights, and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow subjects.

The name as well as the object indicate the growth of a sense of unity of the people of British India—the first essence of nationalism. This sense was further developed in 1849 when four Bills were introduced by the Government to extend the jurisdiction of the criminal courts of the East India Company over the British-born subjects. They were then subject only to the Supreme Court of Calcutta, and could commit all kinds of crimes against the Indians in mofussil areas with impunity, for few Indians had the means to go to Calcutta and institute cases against them in the Supreme Court. The Europeans were furious at being deprived of their right to kick or kill the natives at their sweet will, and raised such a violent opposition to the Bills that the Government was



forced to withdraw them. It shocked the English-educated Indians, but taught them the value and need of organized opposition. As a result, the two political associations,—the 'Landholders' Society' and the 'Bengal British India Society'—were amalgamated to form the British Indian Association which was founded on 29 October, 1851.

Shortly before this, the 'National Association' was founded on 14 September, 1851, at the house of Paikpara Raj, its chief promoters being Prasanna Kumar Tagore and Devendra Nath Tagore. As the latter was the first Secretary of both these Associations, and nothing more is known of the 'National Association' perhaps it was merged in the 'British Indian Association'.

The 'British Indian Association' had from the very beginning developed an all-India outlook. It established political contact with the leading figures of all provinces in British India with the result that a branch of it was founded in Madras, and a similar Association was established in Bombay. The ideal of United India on a common political programme thus took a definite shape for the first time in the history of British India. Of course, the 'British Indian Association' fully inherited the loyal traditions of old, and sincerely believed that "when the real state of things is understood the British Parliament will not long delay justice to India". So the Association took advantage of the introduction of the new Charter Act in the British Parliament to send, in 1852, a long memorandum, suggesting reforms in various branches of Indian administration. This memorandum dwelt at great length upon the evils of the union of political or executive powers with the legislative, and prayed for the establishment of a Legislature, which should "be a body not only distinct from the persons in whom the political and executive powers are vested, but also possessing a popular character so as in some respects to represent the sentiments of the people and to be so looked upon by them". Hence the petitioners desired that "the legislature of British India be placed on the footing of those enjoyed by most of the colonies of Her Majesty". They accordingly proposed the constitution of a Legislative Council, composed of 17 members, including three representatives of the people and one nominated official from each of the Presidencies.

Among other prayers in the petition may be mentioned the reduction of the salaries of the higher officers, such as the Governor-General, the members of Council, the local Governors, Residents, and the principal Covenanted Officers; separation of the functions of Magistrates and Judges, abolition of salt-duty, *abkari* duty and the stamp duties, and the discontinuance of the payment for ecclesiastical establishment.

The memorandum shows the development of political ideas in Bengal during the second quarter of the 19th century, and it may be said without much exaggeration that the political demands made by the Indian National Congress up to 1905 did not go much beyond those formulated by the British Indian Association more than half a century before. The Association also initiated the movement to spread political ideas among the com-



mon people. For this purpose it established branches in different parts of Bengal, and circulated Bengali translation of various Government Bills for eliciting public opinion.

The idea of nationalism was fostered by the growth of political ideas and political organizations in Bengal, and took an all-India and non-sectarian character based on the consciousness of a common political interest of the people in British India. It was no doubt mainly the work of the Hindu leaders, for the very simple reason that the Muslims lagged behind the Hindus in English education which created these ideas, and the energy and enthusiasm of the Muslims was directed to a separate channel of Muslim nationalism symbolized by the Wahabi movement. But though the Hindus of Bengal had to act without the co-operation of the Muslim community, they never thought in terms of sectarianism, and took as the basis of nationalism the people of British India as a whole irrespective of class and creed.

This type of nationalism got a fillip from several external factors. In the first place, the knowledge of English possessed by the educated classes all over India made it possible for them to communicate freely with each other. Secondly, new postal facilities and development of railway lines brought the people of India closer together to form a fraternity, at least in the political field. Thirdly, the introduction of printing press facilitated the communication of ideas among a large section of the population through books and newspapers, and the dissemination of political ideas and sentiments through periodicals was one of the most important factors in the development of nationalism. Fourthly, the growing volume of discontent caused by the evils of British rule, in particular, the grinding poverty of the people, and the haughty, arrogant behaviour of the British towards Indians of all classes helped the growth of a national spirit. Fifthly, the nationalist upheavals in Europe in 1830 and 1848 must have produced a stirring effect on the English educated Indians.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the nationalism in Bengal was, strictly speaking, an intellectual movement. It was mainly confined to the English-educated classes who believed in evolution rather than revolution. Unflinching loyalty to the English, a belief in their sense of justice, and hence an unbounded faith in constitutional agitation, were the chief characteristics of this nationalism. This is the reason why it felt no sympathy for, and gave no support to, the outbreak of 1857. The Sepoys and the revolutionary leaders knew this, and had a supreme hatred or contempt for the Bengalis, and deliberately ill-treated them in many places. The events of 1857-58 do not seem to have affected in any way the course of the development of nationalism in Bengal.

#### IV. HINDU NATIONALISM.

One serious obstacle in the development of Indian nationalism was the Anglo-phil mentality of a section of the English-educated Bengalis.



They became very much anglicised and had inordinate fondness for everything English. They adopted Western ideas and habits, dresses and mannerisms, customs and usages, and openly indicated their repugnance to everything Indian. They spoke in English, thought in English, and, as humorously remarked by Bhudeb Mukherji, probably even dreamed in English. They had a sneering contempt for almost everything Indian. These evils grew with the spread of English education, and in course of time a small group of Westernised people formed a distinct section within the Indian community.

This state of things was a serious menace to the growth of real national feelings. Fortunately, there was a turning of the tide in the sixties. This was mainly due to the development of Indology which, for the first time, made the English-educated Indians aware of the greatness and glory of the ancient Hindus. The regular archaeological explorations and excavations commenced by the Government in 1861 and the writings of a notable band of Indologists, mostly Europeans, evoked in the minds of the Indians a very vivid picture of the glory and greatness of ancient India. One can easily imagine what effect would be produced on Indians, despised and down-trodden in modern times, and initiated into the belief that they had ever been so, when they read in the books written by Europeans that their fore-fathers belonged to the same racial stock from which were descended all the great European nations of ancient and modern times, that Asoka ruled over an Empire more extensive than the British Empire of India, that the Vedas were the oldest literary works in the world, that the Upanishads contained the most profound philosophical speculations that human mind has ever conceived, and that Buddhism, a religion originating in India, was still followed by one-fifth of the human race. Every Indian heart must have felt an indescribable thrill of emotion when tribute was paid by European scholars to ancient culture and civilization of India in terms, of which a specimen may be quoted from Max Müller's famous book, *India, What can it teach us*: "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India".

All this had a two-fold effect. It arrested, to some extent, the growth of Anglicism and a feeling of repugnance to Indian culture and thus saved the nascent Indian nationalism from a grave crisis. But it also gave a new turn to the whole conception of nationalism in Bengal. The sense of



common political interest created by a developed political consciousness which had hitherto formed the only basis of Indian nationalism proved too feeble when faced by the current of Hindu nationalism which was born of a legitimate pride in Hinduism.

As mentioned above, the sense of fellow-feeling which constitutes the essence of nationalism is generally based on some common bonds—of language, race, religion, culture, historical tradition, etc. Of these none existed in India, taken as a whole. But the Hindus had a common religion, a common culture based on a common language, namely Sanskrit, and above all, a common political ideal, and means of communication through the knowledge of English. To all these was now added the historical tradition of a glorious past revealed more and more by the testimony, not only of political greatness, but also of high development of art, literature, philosophy and science in ancient India.

The result was the growth of a strong fellow-feeling among the Hindus, more or less of the same type which had already developed among the Muslims on the basis, more or less, of the same factors. Since the sixties these two rival national sentiments developed side by side, though the original type of Indian nationalism, based mainly on political grounds, was never lost sight of, and played a dominant part.

As a matter of fact this type of Indian nationalism got a fillip from the Brahma Samaj movement initiated by Raja Rammohan Roy and fully developed under Keshab Chandra Sen in the sixties. The spirit which challenges unquestioned obedience to religious authority, also, consciously or unconsciously, influences a human being to assume a similar attitude towards social and political affairs. Keshab was actually instrumental in extending it to the social sphere. He proclaimed a new gospel of personal freedom and social equality which reacted very powerfully upon the infant national consciousness and the new political life and aspirations in Bengal. In two other ways Keshab helped the development of nationalism. First, his victories, in dispute and discussions, over the Christian missionaries in India, and the great honour he received in England removed to a large extent the inferiority-complex from which the Indians were suffering, and gave them a large degree of self-confidence. Secondly, his all-India tour for spreading the Brahma religious ideas fostered the idea of national unity among the diverse peoples of India. Henry Cotton has justly observed: "The death of Keshav Sen in January, 1884, was one of the earliest occasions for the manifestation of a truly national sentiment in the country. The residents of all parts of India, irrespective of caste and creed, united with one voice in the expression of sorrow at his loss and pride in him as members of one common nation".

But, for two reasons, Keshab could not make any lasting impression on his countrymen, namely, his strong leanings to Christianity and Western culture, and his open renunciation of Hinduism. Both of these were highly detrimental to nationalism and provoked a challenge from an



unexpected quarter. Rajnarain Bose, himself a product of English education, and a member of the Brahma Samaj, gave a rousing call to the people of Bengal to turn their gaze from the West to their own culture and traditions. He held out before his countrymen a complete and comprehensive picture of nationalism, touching almost every aspect of life, in a prospectus which he issued in 1861<sup>3</sup> with a view to the establishment of a "Society for the promotion of National Feeling among the educated Natives of Bengal." The object of this Society was to resist the powerful tendency of imitating the West, by reviving the old ideas, traditions and customs in every walk of life. Indigenous gymnastic exercises, Indian music, Hindu medicine, Bengali food, dress and etiquette, etc. were to replace the foreign forms thereof, recently introduced; boys were to learn their mother-tongue before English, cultivation of Sanskrit was to be encouraged, results of researches in Indian antiquities were to be published in Bengali, English words were not to be mixed with Bengali in ordinary conversations between Bengalis, and proceedings of meetings were to be conducted in Bengali.

A few years later Rajnarain himself proceeded to base his nationalism on the Hindu religion. He had deliberately eschewed politics and religion from the purview of the Society which he founded in 1861 for the promotion of national feeling among the Bengalis. But in 1872 he delivered a lecture boldly proclaiming "the superiority of Hindu religion and culture over European and Christian theology and civilization". The Hindus, said he, had forgotten their past to such an extent that they had no recollection of the fact that rational thinking and ideas of social and personal freedom were not wanting in the history of their own culture. Rajnarain Bose boldly asserted that "not only have we the most perfect system of theism or monotheism in our ancient theology and religion, but Hinduism presented also a much higher social idealism, all its outer distinctions of caste notwithstanding, than has as yet been reached by Christendom". How far his views were historically correct, we need not discuss in the present context. But there is no doubt that he deliberately proceeded to found nationalism on the basis of Hindu religion as he conceived it. At the conclusion of his lecture he quoted the following lines of Milton: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks; methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day heaven". He then observed: "Similarly I may say that I see in my mind the noble and puissant Hindu nation rousing herself after sleep, and rousing headlong towards progress with divine powers. I see this rejuvenated nation again illuminating the world by her knowledge, spirituality and culture, and the glory of Hindu nation again spreading over the whole world. In this hope I bring this discourse to a close after reciting panegyric of India's triumph". He then recited a national song composed by Satyendra Nath Tagore, the elder brother of Rabindra Nath and the first Indian member of the Indian Civil Service.



This famous song was a stirring call to the sons of India to unite and sing the glory of India, unequalled in the whole world for her natural beauty, material resources, and the galaxy of her ideal women, sages and poets.

It is hardly necessary to state that the ideas of Rajnarain were catching and his clarion call rallied round his banner a large number of Hindus who accepted his views with enthusiasm, and probably without argument or discussion.

One of the disciples of Rajnarain gave a practical shape to the nationalist ideas preached by him. In 1865 Nabagopal Mitra published the '*National Paper*', and in 1867 he started an annual gathering, known as 'the Hindu Mela', in order "to promote the national feeling, sense of patriotism and a spirit of self-help among the Hindus". The special features of the gathering were patriotic songs, poems and lectures, a detailed review of the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of India, an exhibition of indigenous arts and crafts, and performances of indigenous forms of physical exercises and feats of physical strength. It had an all-India outlook, and specimens of arts and crafts were collected from Banaras, Jaipur, Lakhnau, Patna and Kashmir.

The Hindu Mela met altogether fourteen times from 1867 to 1880. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of its contribution to the growth of national feeling in Bengal. The patriotic songs and poems sung and recited in this Mela, including two by Rabindra Nath, then a boy of 18, are still regarded as treasures of Bengali literature.

An association, called the 'National Society', was founded after the fourth session of the Mela. Its avowed object was the promotion of unity and national feeling among the Hindus. As the Mela was confined to the Hindus, objection was taken to the use of the word 'National'. Against this, the *National Paper*, the organ of the Mela, observed as follows :

"We do not understand why our correspondent takes exception to the Hindus who certainly form a nation by themselves, and as such a society established by them can very well be called 'National Society' ".

This was not an isolated expression of views, casually formed, but rested on a deep-rooted conviction which, at first confined to a small section, was gradually imbibed, consciously or unconsciously, by a large majority of educated people.

Nabagopal elaborated his view of Hindu nationalism through his writings. 'He held that the chief criterion of nationalism is unity. This unity, according to him, is brought about, sustained and promoted in different peoples by different means and on different principles. The principle which promoted nationalism amongst the Greeks was love of country, amongst the Jew the Mosaic Law, amongst the Romans the love of liberty and renown, and amongst the English the love of liberty. He maintained that the basis of national unity in India has been the Hindu religion'. 'He maintained that the basis of national unity in India has been the Hindu religion'. "Hindu nationality", he said, "is not confined to Bengal. It embraces all of Hindu name and Hindu faith through-



out the length and breadth of Hindustan ; neither geographical position, nor the language is counted a disability. The Hindus are destined to be a religious nation".<sup>4</sup>

Nationalism was thus launched in Bengal on the firm foundation of Hinduism which not only served as a cementing bond between the eighty per cent. people of India such as nothing else could provide at that time, and also received an impetus and inspiration from the image of glory and greatness of the ancient Hindus which Indological studies and archaeological excavations exhibited in more and more brilliant colours every day.

#### V. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE GROWTH OF HINDU NATIONALISM

The idea of Hindu nationalism found an intellectual leader in Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the greatest literary figure in Bengal in the nineteenth century. He put Hindu nationalism on a logical or philosophical basis by his Bengali writings. A few extracts, in free translation, may be given below :

"I am a Hindu, you are a Hindu, Ram is a Hindu, Jadu is a Hindu, and there are many lakhs of such Hindus. Whatever is good for them is good for me. Whatever is bad for them is also bad for me. So I must do what is good for all the Hindus and abstain from doing what is bad for any Hindu. Ram, Jadu, indeed every Hindu must act likewise. If it be so, it is the duty of the Hindus to take counsel together, and agree upon a definite policy and chalk out a common line of action. This conception is the first half of nationalism.

"There are many nations in the world besides the Hindu. Whatever is good to them is not necessarily good to us. In many cases what is good to them is bad to us. In such cases we must so act as to deprive them of the good. If this involves oppression of other nations, we shall not shrink from it. Similarly, something that is good to us might bring evil to them. Even so, we must not cease to work for the good of our nation ; if that means causing evil to another nation, we shall do so. This is the second half of nationalism".

Bankim forestalled modern criticism by admitting that nationalism, as conceived by him, is not a holy or ethical sentiment and has produced great evils in Europe. But he defended it as follows :

"Whether nationalism is good or bad, whichever nation possesses it in a greater degree becomes more powerful than others. National consciousness is very strong in Europe today and has caused many a political revolution. It has unified Italy. It is at the root of the most powerful German Empire. What more will happen, none can tell".

Bankim Chandra's novels also fostered Hindu nationalism. His famous novel, *Anandamath*, probably advanced the cause of nationalism in Bengal—as well as in India—such as no other novel has ever done anywhere in the world. Its central plot moves round a band of



*Sannyasins*, called *Santanans* or children. They worshipped their motherland as the Goddess Kali—they knew no other deity save the land of their birth, and no other religion except the service of their motherland. That is why they called themselves *santanans* or children of the mother. In their temple they placed three images of the Goddess Kali representing the motherland—Mother that was, great and glorious in her majestic grandeur ; Mother that is, wretched and grovelling in the dust ; and the Mother that will be, in her pristine glory.

Though Bankim Chandra never openly preached Hindu nationalism as a counterpoise to Muslim nationalism such as was preached by the Wahabis, his writings had an inevitable tendency to foster the former. In his general discourse on nationalism, quoted above, he argues on the basis of Hindu nationalism. In the *Anandamath*, though his reference to Muslim rule was merely a cloak in disguise for British rule, the introduction of Kali as the inspiring Goddess of patriotism gives a distinctly Hindu stamp to his conception of nationalism. In many of his novels and other writings one comes across his passionate outburst against the Muslim conquest of India. 'From that day set the sun of our glory', is a sentiment repeatedly expressed by him, and it occasionally leads him to use irreverent words against Muslims as a class.

Many eminent Bengali poets who wrote patriotic verses and thereby helped the cause of nationalism, lent indirect support to the cause of Hindu nationalism. Rangalal's famous 'Ode to Liberty' is a notable instance. Its opening line, which has been in the mouth of almost every educated Bengali ever since its composition, may be translated as follows : "Breathes there the man who would like to live, though shorn of liberty" ? And this was put in the mouth of a Rajput fighting for his country against the Muslims. Nabin Chandra Sen, another famous poet of Bengal, wrote a long poem on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales (future Edward VII) to India. He makes Mother India recount in stirring verses to her guest her lost glory of the past and illustrate it by the heroic achievements of the Marathas, Sikhs, and her other children, but no mention is made of the Muslims.

The idea of Hindu nationalism was deeply ingrained even in the hearts of many Hindu writers in Bengal who would never admit its influence and were consciously unaware of its existence. The best example is furnished by the greatest poet of India, Rabindranath Tagore, whose international humanism, recognised all over the world, could be hardly regarded as compatible with a communal outlook. Yet the fact remains that though his poems were inspired by the glory and greatness of the heroes belonging to the Sikhs, Rajputs, and Maratha clans, he never wrote a single verse in praise of a Muslim hero—though lots of them flourished in India. This shows where lay the basis of nineteenth century nationalism in Bengal.

At the same time it is only fair to mention that the Muslim writers were similarly imbued with the spirit of Muslim nationalism through-





out the nineteenth century even long after Wahabism had died out.<sup>5</sup> It may be that Hindu nationalism among Bengali writers was partly a reaction to Muslim attitude.

Yet, it would be wrong to maintain that broad ideas of nationalism, embracing India as a whole, irrespective of race or creed, were at any time lacking in Bengal. Throughout the nineteenth century the two types of nationalism developed side by side.

## VI. INDIAN NATIONALISM

As mentioned above, Naba Gopal Mitra's ideal of Hindu nationalism did not find favour even with many of his contemporaries. Reference has been made above to patriotic poems of Kashi Prasad Ghosh in English. Echoes of this broad non-sectarian nationalism are met with also in Bengali literature. Poet Ishwar Chandra Gupta expressed it in a crude way when he said that he would prefer a dog of his own country to a god of foreigners. Faint beginnings of such patriotic sentiments, expressed in dignified language, are met with casually in the poems of Madhu Sudan Dutt. Reference has been made above to the patriotic poems of Rangalal and Nabin Sen. But the greatest patriotic poet was Hem Chandra Banerji. The burthen of his poems was a passionate appeal to India to awake and arise. His brilliant satire on the Anglo-Indian agitation against the Ilbert Bill and the presentation, by a Bengali gentleman of Calcutta, of the ladies of his family to the Prince of Wales are really strong appeals to the national sentiments and feelings of self-respect of the Indians.

Bipin Chandra Pal describes as follows Hem Chandra's influence upon young Bengal :

"Hem Chandra, however, was our special favourite. The intense patriotic passion that breathed through his poems captured our youthful minds in a way which no other Bengalee poems had done. The new generation of English-educated Bengalees had already commenced to advance themselves to positions of trust and responsibility in the new administration. In the learned professions of law and medicine also, they were gradually asserting themselves as against the British members. A new spirit of independence and self-assertion was increasingly manifesting itself in the conduct and conversations of the English educated Bengalee. All these had already commenced to provoke a racial conflict in the country. Hem Chandra was, in a special sense, the poet of this new conflict and of the racial self-respect and sensitive patriotism, born of it".<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of Bengali literature in the development of nationalism in Bengal. Not only poems and songs but even dramas made a passionate appeal to patriotism and nationalism. Reference may be made to the *Bharata-mata* (Mother India) which proclaimed the gospel of the religion of motherland. The follow-



ing specimen of a song from this drama illustrates the anguish of a patriot's heart which it was the deliberate design of the author to evoke :

"O India, gloomy is thy face,  
Beautiful that was as the moon ;  
Tears flow from thine eyes,  
Throughout day and night".

The Bengali poems, songs and dramas were made powerful vehicles for emphasizing and deeply imprinting upon popular mind, the glaring evils of the British rules and the abject, hopeless condition to which the Indians were reduced. When the *Nila-darpana* of Dinabandhu Mitra, depicting the horrible oppression of the indigo-planters, was staged, the audience got wild with passion against the white planters, and sometimes they so far forgot themselves that they threw their shoes at the poor actor on the stage. The economic ruin that Britain wrought in India was vividly brought home in a song put in a novel, *Bangadhipa parajaya* (defeat of the King of Bengal) depicting the conquest of Bengal by a foreign people who came from a high island in the sea (*Tungadvipa*). "The weaver and the blacksmith are crying day and night. They cannot earn their food by plying their trade. Even threads and needles come from distant shores. Even match-sticks are not produced in the country. Whether in dressing themselves or producing their domestic utensils or even in lighting their oil-lamps,—in nothing are the people independent of their foreign masters . . . . . Swarms of locusts from a distant island coming to these shores have eaten up all its solid grains, leaving only the chaff for the starving children of the soil".

History was also enlisted in the cause of nationalism. As Bengal had no knowledge in those days of her own great heroes, the lives of Rajput, Maratha and Sikh heroes took their place. The patriotism of Rana Pratap and the heroic deeds of Shivaji were house-hold words in Bengal. It would be difficult to find in any literature such stirring poems as Rabindra Nath Tagore wrote on Shivaji and the Sikh Gurus, Banda and Guru Govinda.

Next to literature, the press was the greatest contributing factor to the growth of nationalism in the second half of the 19th century. The periodicals, both in English and Bengali, owned and edited by the Bengalis, generally speaking, performed their duties very well. It disseminated general information and political ideas and ruthlessly exposed, day after day, the evils of the British rule. The appalling poverty caused by heavy drain of wealth from India, the ruin of her trade and industry for the sake of British interest, costly civil and military administration, and heavy land revenue and general taxation, was the chief target of attack. The periodicals brought to public notice the arrogant behaviour of the Englishmen in India, particularly the brutal assaults upon the Indians, sometimes ending in their death, which most often went un-



punished, the social exclusiveness of the Britishers, and other evils of this type. All these, regularly brought out in the periodicals—specially the *Hindoo Patriot* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*—quickened the national consciousness of the Bengalis and increased their animosity to the British.

Such a spirit of animosity against the foreign rulers lies at the root of the effort of the subject people to achieve liberty, and forms the first stage of true nationalism. The Bengali press deliberately fanned the flame of such animosity. A vernacular monthly, *Siksh-darpana O Sambada-Sara*, edited by Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya (1864), was the first to stress the inevitable animosity between the rulers and the ruled, and coined the word '*jati-vairita*' to denote this. The idea underlying this was fully developed by Bankim Chandra Chatterji who observed: "It is not in human nature for the conquered to respect the conquerors or regard them as selfless benefactors, and for the conquerors to shrink from employing physical force . . . . This racial animosity is the natural result of our present condition ; there will be no end of it so long as the foreigners rule over us, and we, though inferior, remember our past glory. We whole-heartedly pray that this conflict may influence us so long as we do not become equal to the Englishmen". Some of the Bengali papers like *Aryadarsana*, edited by Jogendra Nath Vidyabhushan, furthered the cause of nationalism by preaching revolutionary ideas through the lives of Mazzini, Garibaldi and other revolutionary leaders in Italy.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, as the editor himself said, began by teaching that "we are we" and "they are they"—the simplest and briefest expression of *jati-vairita*.

That the achievement of independence was the guiding idea of the paper appears clearly from a Bengali verse which regularly appeared as its motto for some time since May 7, 1868. It may be freely translated as follows :

"Alas! It is grievous to think how the poison of subjection has changed the sons of Aryas beyond recognition". The advanced political ideal of the time was voiced by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. On 31 December, 1868, it wrote :

"The Bengalis are determined to oppose the tyranny of Englishmen at every step. The conflict between the Bengalis and the English is becoming more and more serious every day. The English want to keep the Bengalis down, the Bengalis want to stand up. The English find that the Bengalis can no longer be cowed down by merely bullying or bribery ; so they adopt sterner measures. But thousands of Bengalis are now determined either to achieve their ends or lay down their lives. In this struggle we do not blame either the English or the Bengalis. Let the Commissioner of the Presidency Division try to curb the spirit of freedom of the Bengalis as his national interest demands. But if the Bengalis do their duty Chapman will surely fail, for God is on our side. He befriends the weak and the helpless slaves, and to Him the English, the



Hindus, the White, the Black, the Christian and the idolaters are all alike".

On 22 May, 1874, we find the following :

"It was the indigo disturbances which first taught the natives the value of combination and political agitation. Indeed it was the first revolution in Bengal after the advent of the English. If there be a second revolution it will be to free the nation from the death grips of the all-powerful police and district Magistrate. Nothing like oppression ! It was the oppression which brought about the glorious revolution in England and it was the oppression of half a century by indigo planters which at last roused the half-dead Bengalee and infused spark in his cold frame".

The *Bengalee*, under the editorship of Surendra Nath Banerji (since 1st January, 1879), along with the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, became the most advanced organs of national opinion, and made the greatest contribution to the development of nationalism, not only in Bengal but in the whole of India. The Bengali journals were not behindhand. The *Sanjibani* (1883) adopted as its motto, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity".

The different factors, mentioned above, that gave birth to nationalism, also continued to develop it still further. The English literature provided as great a stimulus to the Hindu College students as to the next two generations of young Bengalis. The great poet Rabindra Nath has described in his inimitable way the inspiration he received from the English literature in his younger days, i.e. in the seventies and eighties.

"When I was young", he writes, "we were all full of admiration for Europe, with its high civilization and its vast scientific progress, and especially for England, which had brought this knowledge to our own doors. We had come to know England through her glorious literature, which had brought a new inspiration into our young lives. The English authors, whose books and poems we studied, were full of love for humanity, justice, and freedom.

"This great literary tradition had come down to us from the revolution period. We felt its power in Wordsworth's sonnets about human liberty. We gloried in it even in the immature productions of Shelley, written in the enthusiasm of youth, when he declared against the tyranny of priestcrafts and preached the overthrow of all despotisms through the power of suffering bravely endured.

"All this fired our youthful imaginations. We believed with all our simple faith that even if we rebelled against foreign rule, we would have the sympathy of the West. We felt that England was on our side in wishing us to gain our freedom".

A vernacular paper in Bengal expressed almost a religious reverence for the Englishmen. "It is their Wilberforces, Hampdens, Mills, Brights, Metcalfes, Macaulays, and hundreds of other great men, whose liberal principles have captivated us, and we have regarded them as the very model of morality, and hold them in veneration".



Another important factor in the growth and development of nationalism in Bengal during the second half of the 19th century was the rise of a number of great personalities. Reference has been made to Rajnarain Bose and Bankim Chandra Chatterji in connection with Hindu nationalism. Foremost among those who upheld the ideal of a secular and homogeneous Indian nationalism, broadbased on the community of political interest, was Surendra Nath Banerji. If Rajnarain Bose may be called the father of Bengali nationalism, Surendra Nath may be justly regarded as the father of Indian nationalism. His career deserves a somewhat detailed study, as the political progress and national regeneration of India centre round it.

Surendra Nath passed the Civil Service Examination in 1869, but was dismissed from service in 1874 for what is now generally regarded as a very minor offence of a technical character. He then devoted himself to political work and consecrated his life to the service of the motherland. He was an eloquent speaker and his lectures produced a remarkable effect upon young students. He soon established his position as the leader of a new youth movement which practically supplanted the new religious movement of Keshab Chandra Sen which had hitherto caught the imagination of young Bengal.

There is no doubt that it was mainly due to Surendra Nath that the attention of Young Bengal was diverted from the field of religious and social reform to patriotism and political organization. He inspired the young students by his lectures on Joseph Mazzini and the Young Italy Movement. By his wonderful eloquence he vividly drew the picture of Italy's misery under Austrian domination, which could not fail to evoke in the mind of his audience the similar condition of India under British rule.

In a speech in 1878 he urged the young men of India to dedicate their lives for the good of their country, and laid special emphasis on the unity among different communities.

Here are a few passages :

"Young men, your country expects great things from you. Now I ask, how many of you are prepared, when you have finished your studies at the College, to devote your lives, to consecrate your energies to the good of your country (cries of "all", "all") . . . . . There comes a time in the history of a nation's progress, when every man may verily be said to have a mission of his own to accomplish. Such a time has now arrived for India. The fiat has gone forth. The celestial mandate has been issued that every Indian must now do this duty, or stand condemned before God and man. There was such a time of stirring activity in the glorious annals of England when . . . . . (refers to Hampden, Algernon Sydney and the Seven Bishops). . . . .

"It is not indeed necessary for us to have recourse to violence in order to obtain the redress of our grievances. Constitutional agitation will secure for us those rights, the privileges which in less favoured countries



are obtained by sterner means. But peaceful as are the means to be enforced, there is a stern duty to be performed by every Indian. And he who fails in that duty is a traitor before God and man.

"Three hundred years ago, in the Punjab, the immortal founder of Sikhism, the meek, the gentle, the blessed Nanak preached the great doctrine of unity and endeavoured to knit together Hindus and Musalmans under the banner of a common faith. That attempt was eminently successful. . . . .

"In the name, then, of a common country, let us all, Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Parsees, members of the great Indian Community, throw the pall of oblivion over jealousies and dissensions of bygone times and embracing one another in fraternal love and affection, live and work for the benefit of our beloved fatherland".

Perhaps no one before Surendra Nath made such a passionate appeal for building up an Indian nation without any difference of caste, creed or community.

In order to give practical shape to these ideals Surendra Nath, with the help of others, founded the 'Indian Association' on 26th July, 1876.<sup>7</sup> Its *raison d'être* has been explained as follows by Surendra Nath himself :

"The idea that was working in our minds was that the Association was to be the centre of an all-India movement. For even then, the conception of a united India, derived from the inspiration of Mazzini, or, at any rate, of bringing all India upon the same common political platform, had taken firm possession of the minds of the Indian leaders in Bengal. We accordingly resolved to call the new political body the Indian Association". Surendra Nath also defines the object of this Association in the following words :

"(1) The creation of a strong body of public opinion in the country; (2) the unification of the Indian races and peoples upon the basis of common political interests and aspirations ; (3) the promotion of friendly feeling between Hindus and Muhammadans ; and, lastly, the inclusion of the masses in the great public movements of the day".

Thus was brought into being what may be called the first national organization on an all-India basis. Its activity was fully in consonance with its ideals. The first all-India agitation was launched by the Indian Association against the new regulation which reduced the age-limit of the competitors for the Indian Civil Service Examination from 21 to 19, making it extremely difficult for an Indian boy to pass it. Being backed by the support of the other provinces, a public meeting held in Calcutta decided to send a memorial to the British Parliament protesting against the obnoxious measure. But though this was the ostensible object, the true aim and purpose of the agitation was, as Surendra Nath put it, "the awakening of a spirit of unity and solidarity among the people of India". The meeting accordingly decided "to bring the various Indian Provinces upon the same common platform (a thing that has never been attempted



before) and to unite them through the sense of a common grievance and the inspiration of a common resolve".

The task of carrying out this higher purpose was entrusted to Surendra Nath, and he was appointed a special delegate to visit the different parts of India. Surendra Nath discharged this onerous duty with great ability and industry. He left Calcutta on May 26, 1877, and made a prolonged tour in Upper India, visiting Banaras, Allahabad, Kanpur, Lakhnau, Aligarh, Delhi, Agra, Meerut, Amritsar and Lahore. Next year he made a similar tour in the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay. At all these places he addressed crowded public meetings which endorsed the resolutions passed at the Calcutta public meeting. But he did something more. At Allahabad, Kanpur, Lakhnau, Meerut and Lahore he organized new political associations to act in concert with the Indian Association of Calcutta. The existing political organisations in other places also agreed to make a common cause. The foundation of concerted political action was thus well and truly laid.

The propaganda tour of Surendra Nath demonstrated that in spite of differences in language, creed, and social institutions, the English-educated people of this great sub-continent were bound by a common tie of ideals and interest, creating a sense of underlying unity which enabled them to combine for a common political objective. For the first time within living memory, or even historical tradition, there emerged the idea of India over and above the congeries of States and Provinces into which it was divided.

This idea got a fillip from two events happening in 1883. The first was the great controversy over a legislative measure introduced by Mr. Ilbert, the Law Member of the Viceroy's Council, and hence popularly known as the Ilbert Bill. In those days the European British subjects enjoyed the privilege of trial by a judge of their own race, and hence Indian Civilian, even though they might hold the rank of Magistrates or Sessions Judges, could not try any European criminal. The Ilbert Bill sought to withdraw this privilege in order to remove a galling and glaring instance of racial inequality.

As in 1849, so in 1883, the Englishmen in India set up a violent and rowdy agitation, which was unparalleled in its bitter attacks against the Indians and often descended below the limit of decency. The Government of India bent before the storm and withdrew the Bill. The Indians tasted the cup of bitterness and failure, but learnt the value of political organisation from their enemy.

The second event was the imprisonment of Surendra Nath on the charge of contempt of court. It evoked a spontaneous protest all over Bengal, and numerous attended public meetings were held in all important towns. The meeting in Calcutta was attended by about twenty thousand people. Even the masses were affected and *hartal* was observed in Calcutta. Far more significant was the fact that similar demonstrations were held in every part of India. Such scenes were never witnessed



before, nor till the *Swadeshi* movement of 1905. The seeds of nationalism sown by Surendra Nath all over India bore fruit on the occasion of his incarceration. The most significant effect of all this was the growth of an idea of a National Conference of all-India character. The move, initiated by the Indian Association, was fully supported by its branches in North India and the leading political organizations of Bombay and Madras.

The first National Conference was held in Calcutta on 28, 29 and 30 December, 1883. It was not a regional or sectional, but truly national gathering. The Conference was attended by more than a hundred delegates, both Hindu and Muslim, and the places they represented, outside Bengal, included Bombay, Madras, Lahore, Allahabad, Cuttack, Jubbulpore, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Bankipore, Muzaffarpore, Darbhanga, Deoghur, Sagar, Bhagalpur, Meerut, Tejpur, Hossainpore, etc.

The object of the Conference was explained by Surendra Nath in the following words :

"We have met to talk, to deliberate, to consult, and if possible, to arrive at a common programme of political action. Too often our energies are frittered away in isolated and individual efforts. One Association, for instance, might be agitating for the Reform of the Civil Services, a second for the Reconstitution of the Legislative Councils, a third for Retrenchment of Expenditure. Our idea is to bring the national forces, so to speak, into a focus ; and if possible, to concentrate them upon some common object calculated to advance the public good. Such I conceive to be the prevailing idea of the Conference." The second session of the Conference was held in Calcutta on 25, 26 and 27 December, 1885. More than thirty political Associations sent their representatives. It was more representative than the first as "it was convened by the three leading Associations of Calcutta—the British Indian, representing the landed interest, the Indian, the Association of the middle classes, and the Central Mohamedan Association of which Mr. (now the Rt. Hon. Mr.) Ameer Ali was Secretary." The last two did not join the first Conference.

The Indian Association wanted to give a permanent character to the Conference. Accordingly Surendra Nath moved that a Conference of delegates from different parts of the country should be held next year. The delegates from Allahabad and Meerut lent their support to the resolution. The meeting suggested that the venue of the Conference should be changed every year and it should meet in places like Bombay, Madras, Allahabad and other great capitals of India. This resolution was carried with acclamation.<sup>8</sup>

This scheme did not materialize, for immediately after the end of the second session of the National Conference in Calcutta, "the Indian National Congress, conceived on the same lines and having the same programme", held its first session at Bombay. The movements were simultaneous, and even Surendra Nath was not invited till at the very last moment when "it was too late to suspend the Conference". The two All-India gatherings "discussed similar views and voiced the same



grievances and aspirations''. After this, the workers of the National Conference joined the Indian National Congress, which henceforth continued to be the only All-India political organization.

The Indian National Congress was the result, rather the culmination of the evolution of the political ideas and organizations mentioned above. It is not necessary here to speculate upon the objects which the organisers of the congress had in view, but from its second session in Calcutta it fully adopted the developed political ideas preached by the Indian Association and National Conference. In any case, it soon became the visible symbol of that all-India nationality on the basis of a common political interest and aspirations, irrespective of caste, creed, race or community, which was dreamt by Surendra Nath and was initiated by his political tour all over India. The Congress was unflinching in its loyalty and devotion to the British throne, and solely relied on constitutional agitation for bringing about reforms in Indian administration—the only aim they professed during the first twenty years (1885-1905). The members had unbounded faith in the British sense of justice and had no doubt in their minds that the British would concede every demand of the Indians as soon as they were convinced of its justice.

But the early enthusiasm in this respect gradually waned as the Government practically turned a deaf ear to the numerous resolutions passed by the Congress year after year. The only practical achievement of the Congress was the grant of a very minute dose of reforms by the Indian Councils Act of 1892. It is true that the success of the Congress should not be measured by the concessions it had wrung from the Government. The annual gathering of leaders and peoples' delegates from all over India on a common political platform, gave a practical form to the idea of Indian nationalism and made it a reality, while discussion of political, economic, and administrative problems of India made the Congress a seminar of political education for the educated people. It had, however, two great limitations. In the first place, the general body of Muslims held aloof from it at the instigation of Sir Syed Ahmed, the founder of the Aligarh Movement. It continued the old theory of the Wahabis and regarded the Muslims as a separate nation which must look for its own salvation, not by joining the Hindus in a common cause, but by working out an independent policy of its own. A few Muslim leaders and delegates attended the Congress, but the bulk of the Indian Muslims refused to join it in spite of the earnest efforts of the Congress leaders to win them over. Gradually, the Muslims openly proclaimed the Congress to be a Hindu organisation. There was no foundation of this accusation, for the Congress, from beginning to end, steadily pursued the ideal of one Indian nation comprising Hindu, Muslim and all other communities living in India, and succeeded in deeply impressing this idea upon the minds of all Indians except the followers of Sir Syed Ahmed.

The second drawback of the Congress was that it began as, and remained till 1905, a movement of the English-educated middle classes,



and had no contact with the masses. Even great national leaders like Bepin Chandra Pal was hostile to the idea of spreading political ideas among the masses.

The lack of a broad popular basis, and the policy of mendicancy which the Congress really followed in the name of constitutional agitation, were assailed by the critics. As far back as 1883 Bankim Chandra Chatterji ridiculed the idea of mendicancy, prevalent among the political leaders of his day, and the Congress, which adopted it, found its severest critic in Arabinda Ghose, the newly risen star, as yet scarcely visible, in the firmament of Indian politics, who became the prophet of a new type of nationalism. He published a series of articles in 1893 in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, strongly condemning the aims, the spirit, the method, and the leaders of the Congress. "The Congress", he said, "is not a popular body and has not in any way attempted to become a popular body." The Congress was also condemned as a mere three days' show by some leaders and newspapers in Bengal.

Outside Bengal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak also raised his voice of protest against the aims and methods of the Congress. It was obvious that the Indian National Congress failed to keep pace with the growth of a new type of nationalism which was not satisfied with merely political or administrative reforms, but demanded liberty or freedom as the birth-right of Indians, and recommended the policy of self-help in place of begging bowl and the spreading of political ideas among the masses. These new ideas took a more definite and practical shape after 1905 and need not be discussed any further in this review.<sup>10</sup> But the new type of nationalism of which they were the product, gathered unprecedented momentum from an unexpected source during the period under review.

This was the emergence of Swami Vivekananda as a world figure. A disciple of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he attended the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893, where were assembled noted representatives of all religious sects from all parts of the world. There, in this distinguished Assembly, Vivekananda not only expounded the principles of Hinduism, but also vigorously defended it against the malicious denunciation of the Christian missionaries and the uninformed criticism of the West. He captivated the hearts of his audience and almost overnight became a hero in U.S.A. The civilized nations of the West had hitherto looked down upon Hinduism as a bundle of superstitions, evil institutions, and immoral customs, unworthy of serious consideration in the progressive world of today. Now, for the first time, they not only greeted, with hearty approval, the lofty principles of Hinduism as expounded by Vivekananda, but accorded a very high place to it in the cultures and civilizations of the world. The repercussion of this on the vast Hindu community can be easily imagined. The Hindus had been so long suffering from a sort of inferiority-complex in view of the glamour of Western Civilization. Now, all on a sudden, the table was turned, and the representatives of the West joined in a chorus of applause at the hidden virtues of Hindu-



ism, which were hitherto unsuspected either by friends or foes. It not only restored the self-confidence of the Hindus in their own culture and civilization, but quickened their sense of national pride and patriotism. This sentiment was echoed and re-echoed in the numerous public addresses which were presented to Swami Vivekananda on his home-coming by the Hindus all over India, almost literally from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas. It was a great contribution to the growing Hindu nationalism.

Vivekananda's preachings, on his return to India, gave a new turn to Indian nationalism, and placed it on the solid basis of spirituality and religion. He spread the doctrine of Vedanta which proclaimed the supremacy of immortal soul or spirit over the perishable body. He was proud of India, as the home of this spirituality, and inculcated the highest sense of patriotism. This intense patriotism was inspired by the thought of making India free and once more regaining her pristine glory and greatness. For this, he emphasized, it was necessary that the Indians should acquire physical strength, develop faith in their own power, shed all fears, and consecrate their lives to the economic, moral, and spiritual elevation of the poor ignorant masses of India. He had no faith in the aristocracy or even upper classes, but looked forward to the toiling masses for the regeneration of India. On the basis of the Vedantic doctrine of the identity of the universal soul with individual soul, he looked upon the service of the poor, the ignorant, the untouchables, etc., as the true worship of God, and the word *daridra-narayana* (God in the poor) conveys this idea. He thus put Indian nationalism on the broad bases of patriotism, development of moral, spiritual and physical strength, awakening of the masses, consciousness of, and pride in, the ancient glory and greatness of India, and a belief in the unity of India on a spiritual basis. The following passages from his speeches and writings will be the best way of expounding his ideas.<sup>11</sup>

"Oh India! Wouldst thou attain, by means of thy disgraceful cowardice, that freedom deserved only by the brave and the heroic? Oh India! forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate. The cobbler, the sweeper are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave ones, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim: 'I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother'. Say: 'The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahman Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother'".

"Do you love your fellowman? Where else should you go to seek for God! Are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak—Gods? Why not worship them first?"

"First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita.....I know where the shoe pinches".

"Let her (future India) arise out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fisherman,.....the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory,



from marts and from markets. Let her emerge from the groves and forests, from hills, and mountains. Skeletons of the past, there, before you, are your successors, the Indian that is to be".

"What I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, manhood, *Kshatra-Virya Brahma-Teja*".

Addressing a few young Bengalis who met him in Dacca he said, with reference to the Indian National Congress: "That is not the way to build up Patriotism anywhere. Beggar's bowl has no place in a *Banik's* (merchant's) world of machine, mammon and merchandise. First thing first, and body-building and dare-devilry are the primary concerns before the buoyant young Bengal (*Sariram Adyam*)!"

He continued: "The soul-stirring death-defying *Mantram Abhi*—fearlessness—will shake off age-long vestiges of slave-mentality, superstition and inferiority complex. In order to march boldly in equal pace side by side with other materially advanced nations of the world—ye, Young Bengal, emulate the manly ways of Lakshmi Bai.....Imitate the virtues of other nations, cultivate their technical skill and qualities of life,.....And then, with a modern standard of morale and efficiency attained, pay them, the foreign usurpers, in their own coins in your own country to unfasten the alien octopus-hold on the citadel of oriental culture. But know it for certain, mere imitation will lead you nowhere. You will be swept away from the moorings of your real life."

"Man-making is my mission of life. You try with your comrades to translate this mission of mine into action and reality. Read Bankim-chandra and emulate his *desha-bhakti* (patriotism) and *santana-dharma* (duty of a *santana* as described in the *Anandamath*). Your duty should be service to motherland. India should be free politically first."

Thus both indirectly by his triumph in the West, and directly by building the true bases of nationalism in the country, Vivekananda placed nationalism on a solid foundation on which Arabinda built it later. There seems to be a great deal of truth in the following tribute paid to Vivekananda by a recent historian of India's struggle for *Swaraj*:

"Swami Vivekananda might well be called the father of modern Indian Nationalism; he largely created it and also embodied in his own life its highest and noblest elements".<sup>12</sup>

Whatever we might think of this, no doubt that Hindu nationalism which was latent, but not dead, gathered strength from Vivekananda's teachings though he did not directly preach it.

This chapter may be fittingly concluded with the following review of the progress of nationalism in India made by G. K. Gokhale, while inaugurating the 'Servants of India Society' in 1905: "The growth, during the last fifty years, of a feeling of common nationality, based upon common tradition, common disabilities and common hopes and aspirations, has been most striking. The fact that we are Indians first, and Hindoos, Mahomedans, Parsees, or Christians afterwards, is being realised



in a steadily increasing measure, and the idea of a united and renovated India, marching onwards to a place among the nations of the world worthy of her great past, is no longer a mere idle dream of a few imaginative minds, but is the definitely accepted creed of those who form the brain of the community—the educated classes of the country”.

There is a great deal of truth in it, though the Muslim attitude must be taken into account as a negative factor.

#### REFERENCES

1. For a detailed account of the Wahabi Movement, with full references, cf. *History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay), Vol. IX, pp. 883-901.
2. Bimanbehari Majumdar, *History of Political Thought from Rammohan to Dayananda* (1821-84), p. 164.
3. This is the date given in the Bengali autobiography of Rajnarain Bose (3rd edition, 1952), p. 106. But there are some difficulties in accepting this date in preference to the dates 1865 or 1866, suggested by others.
4. B. Majumdar, op. cit., pp. 293-4.
5. Urdu literature, for example, never ceased to remind the Muslims that they were in India, but not of India. Dr. Saniti Kumar Chatterji observes: “Urdu poetry, up to the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, was just a reflection of Persian poetry; the references were to things and events and ideas of Persia. They use names of all Persian flowers, all the little streams of Persia, its towns, provinces, hills and mountains, but they never mention an Indian flower or an Indian river, mountain or town, much less an Indian hero or heroine. It was an absolute and deliberate shutting of their eyes and ears and mind to all the great things of the country in which they lived, the soil of which, according to a great Urdu poet, was “apak” or “impure”.
6. B. C. Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times*, I, 228-9.
7. For the account that follows, cf. Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making*, Chapter V.
8. For National Conference, cf. ibid, pp. 85, 98; also J. C. Bagal, *History of the Indian Association*, pp. 80-1.
9. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought*, p. 77. Aurobinda further observed: “A body like the Congress, which represents not the mass of the population, but a single and very limited class, could not honestly be called national.” Ibid, p. 76.
10. For a detailed account of these ideas, cf. R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I, pp. 419ff.
11. For the extracts quoted below from the writings and speeches of Swami Vivekananda, and others of similar import, cf. *Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, pp. 408-13; Bhupendranath Datta, *Swami Vivekananda Patriot-Prophet*, pp. 314-42, 371-99; Ekhnath Ranade, *Swami Vivekananda's Rousing Call to Nation* (a compilation of select passages). For Swamiji's contribution to the growth of Indian nationalism, cf. R. C. Majumdar, *Swami Vivekananda, A Historical Review*, Chapter IV, Sections, 5-8.
12. R. G. Pradhan, *India's Struggle for Swaraj*, p. 60.



## THE PRESS IN BENGAL

### I

In the year 1780 Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of the Bengal Presidency, wounded Philip Francis, the leader of opposition in his Council, so severely in a duel that he was compelled to go home. In the same year it occurred to one Mr. James Augustus Hicky, a "most eccentric creature apparently possessed of considerable natural talents, but entirely uncultivated",<sup>1</sup> that great benefit might arise from setting on foot a public newspaper in this country, nothing of that kind ever having appeared. Upon his types and other printing requisites therefore reaching him from England, he issued "Proposals for printing a NEWS-PAPER, in Bengal, to be published every Saturday, by J. A. Hicky, under the title of *The Bengal Gazette, or Calcutta Advertiser*" (actually published as *Hicky's Bengal Gazette ; or Calcutta General Advertiser*, and later as *Hicky's Bengal Gazette ; or The Original Calcutta General Advertiser*). It is India's first newspaper, and it was published as "A Weekly Political and Commercial Paper, Open to all Parties, but influenced by None", on 29 January 1780. Before it was published, "such informations, as are either useful or entertaining, and tending to promote the trading Concerns of industrious individuals," and "the Numerous Notices, Advertisements, etc." were "handed about by Harcarrahs, in Manuscripts," for which their "useful intentions" were "defeated by the impossibility of their being attentively regarded".<sup>2</sup>

The state of society and letters, when Hicky set up his printing press and brought out the first newspaper of India in Bengal, was of a very low order. Cock-fighting and horse-racing, drinking and gambling, and fierce political and commercial rivalries led to frequent duels of which many ended ill. It was a privilege of all gentlemen in those days from a Governor-General downwards, to murder one another by rule. It is no wonder, therefore, that Hicky, despite his pledge in the 'Proposals' that "no anecdote *Personal* or *Domestic* that can possibly convey the smallest offence to any single individual, shall ever be inserted" in his paper, very soon made it a channel of personal invective by attacking ladies and gentlemen of all ranks, high and low, in the most wanton manner. Several prosecutions were instituted against him as the printer and publisher of the Bengal Gazette, till in March 1782 his types were seized, the paper was closed, and he was utterly ruined. It is true that he was a kind of "a wild Irishman" who could not conduct his paper with common prudence and decorum. But there was hardly any code of decorum or sign of prudence in high or low society at the time. He, and the newspaper of which he was the editor, printer and publisher, were the tragic victims of the times. Yet it must be said to the credit of the editor



of the first newspaper of India that he had not surrendered to the will of the rulers of his time, although he was a member of their race, and that he had fought passionately for the freedom of press, rotted in jail for that, and was ruined in consequence.

At the end of the 18th century the Viceregal airs began in Calcutta. Public dinners were given at the Government house on the New Year's days and the King's birthdays to the "gentlemen of the Settlement", and "a ball and supper to the ladies at night". At these entertainments everybody "appeared in full dress, with bags and swords". Each toast, the King, the Queen, the East India Company, the Army and Navy, the Commander-in-Chief, Success to the British arms in India, was followed by a salute of twenty-one guns, from cannon drawn up for the purpose in front of the Court House.<sup>3</sup> *The India Gazette*, *The Calcutta Gazette*, *The Bengal Hurkaru*, *The Calcutta Courier*, *The Calcutta Chronicle*, *The Calcutta Monthly Journal* and other papers followed in quick succession Hicky's newspaper in the last two decades of the 18th century, when Calcutta was resounding with these gun-salutes of public dinners and pistol-shots of duels. The Governors-General, Cornwallis, Wellesley, Minto were all very much sensitive to press criticism, and the editors were frequently harassed for 'improper' and 'intemperate' articles, though less brutally than the poor Hicky was. In view of the political crises he was facing, Marquess Wellesley thought it necessary to subject the press to a rigorous supervision. A rigid press censorship was imposed by him on 13 May 1799. Every copy or proofsheets of a newspaper was required to be submitted to the Secretary for scrutiny before publication. Suppression of the paper by force and immediate deportation of the Editor to England was the penalty for breach of any of the regulations. The editors, none of whom was Indian at the time, were rather coerced to consider it "as a duty incumbent on them to comply in every respect to the Regulations of Government".<sup>4</sup> This was the condition of the newspapers in India, published and read by Europeans, when the eighteenth century drew to its close.

## II

In 1800 the College of Fort Wililam was instituted by Wellesley in Calcutta, much against the will of the Directors, for training up young writers as efficient civilians. The study of Bengali, Hindusthani, Parsee and other 'native' languages was made imperative on them, and qualified persons, versed in these languages, were invited to join as teachers in the College. In 1800 the Baptist Mission was also founded in Serampore, and the Mission Press started printing works in Bengali and other provincial languages. "From this time forward *writing Bengali correctly* may be said to have begun in Calcutta ; a number of books were supplied by



the Serampore Press, which set the example of printing works in this and other eastern languages" (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> It may be said also that from 1800 onwards, after the foundation of the Fort William College and the Baptist Mission, the field was steadily widened for the impact and assimilation of Eastern and Western cultures in this country. The progress was speeded up after the foundation of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817. The Bengali language was struggling to break away from its traditional metrical bondage to become a suitable vehicle for modern thoughts and ideas, problems and complexities of life, till in 1818 a regular periodical could be brought out in it. The first Bengali periodical was monthly *Digdurshan*, published in April 1818 by the Serampore Missionaries and devoted to subjects of historical, geographical and commercial interest. It was followed by the Bengali weekly *Samāchār Darpan* (23 May 1818) published by the same Missionaries, containing all the important news of the day, including editorial observations. Although J. C. Marshman was the editor of the paper, eminent Bengali Pundits were employed to assist in the editorial work. The first Hindu who established Press in Calcutta was some Baboo-Ram, "a native of Hindoosthan". He was followed by Gangakishore Bhattacharya, a Bengali compositor at the Serampore Press, "who appears to have been the first who conceived the idea of printing works in the current language as a means of acquiring wealth,"<sup>6</sup> and published a weekly paper called *Bāṅgāl Gazettēē* in collaboration with Harachandra Roy. This *Bāṅgāl Gazettēē* is the first Bengali periodical published by a Bengali. On the appearance of a newspaper in Bengali language, the *Oriental Star* (16 May, 1818) remarked: "Amongst the improvements which are taking place in Calcutta, we observe with satisfaction that the publication of a Bengali newspaper has been commenced. The diffusion of general knowledge and information amongst the natives must lead to beneficial effects; and the publication we allude to, under proper regulations, may become of infinite use, by affording the more ready means of communication between the natives and the European residents." As *Samāchār Darpan* was published on 23 May, 1818, it appears from the date of the above comment that the *Bāṅgāl Gazettēē* might have been published a few days before it. Besides the translation of civil appointments, government notices and regulations, it contained "such other LOCAL MATTER as were deemed interesting to readers, into a plain, concise and correct Bengalee language," and no pains or trouble were spared "to render it as interesting as possible".<sup>8</sup> "No publication of this nature having hitherto been before the Public," the Proprietor hoped that "the community in general will encourage and support his exertions in the attempt which he had made, and afford him a small share of their Patronage". Bengali prose was still in its swaddling clothes, and the point to render the news as far as readable in "plain, concise and correct Bengali" is therefore important in the above notice. Harachandra and Gangakishore were both inhabitants of Serampore and as pioneer



publishers of Bengali books and periodicals they have, therefore, some claim to Caxton's celebrity in our country.

Harachandra was not an ordinary man. In a Bengali work of Rammohan Roy his name is mentioned and we come to know that he was closely associated with his *Atmiya Sabha*.<sup>9</sup> This Atmiya Sabha was founded by Rammohan sometime in the year 1815 after he had finally settled in Calcutta, with the avowed purpose of free discussion of such social and religious problems as child-marriage, polygamy, caste system, widow remarriage, idolatry, and female education. It was the first modern association of its kind in our country where free discussion of social problems was regularly held and which helped in the creation of a kind of public opinion on such problems. But mere discussions in an association cannot be effective in influencing the mass of people outside it. Some other powerful medium is required for that. Realising this, Rammohan Roy published three journals in course of a few months in 1821-22, the bilingual *Brahmanical Magazine* or *Brāhman Sebadhi* in English and Bengali (September 1821), the *Sambād Cowmoodee* in Bengali (4 December 1821), and the *Miral-ul-Ukhhār* in Persian (12 April 1822). The advent of these papers, with pronounced liberal views on traditional social matters, broke the indifference of people and they were roused from their mental slumber. Opinion began to circulate, and ideas, strange and new, got wings. They clashed inevitably with the old ones, and consequently the conflict imparted a new mobility to a hitherto stagnant society. It produced a favourable atmosphere for the growth of a national press. *Samāchār Chandrikā*, a conservative Bengali periodical, appeared to counteract the social influence of the liberals (5 March 1822). In October 1823 another Bengali periodical, *Sambād Timirnāshak*, was brought out to strengthen the hands of Chandrika, and the liberals took up the fight with energy and courage in their weekly *Bangadōōt* (9 May 1829). The establishment of the Brahma Sabha by Rammohan (20 August 1828) and the abolition of Suttee by William Bentinck (4 December 1829), intensified the conflict between the Liberals and the Conservatives, and the battle of words in the Bengali press reached its climax by the end of the twenties.

The English press, in general, was very much annoyed at the prospect of the 'native' press growing in influence and popularity. A cry was raised to stifle it in its inception. There were few exceptions, however, like Silk Buckingham's *The Calcutta Journal* (1818) which welcomed the Bengali press as useful and beneficial to the interests of the 'natives' and of the British Government. Reprimanding Buckingham for patronising the Cowmoodee, the Asiatic Journal wrote: "A Journal published in the language of the natives, conducted by natives, designed for the perusal of the native Indians, and of them almost exclusively, is set on foot, avowedly, if Mr. Buckingham is to be credited, for the purpose of fomenting their accidental discontents, of opening their eyes to the defects of their rulers, of encouraging and giving utterance not to



their complaints, but to their remonstrances."<sup>10</sup> It pleaded for the reimposition of press censorship, withdrawn by Lord Hastings in 1818. *The Calcutta Monthly Journal* also could not join with those who welcomed the Cowmoodee as "a light for the Gentiles." chiefly because "political discussion is not suited to the prejudices or the capacities of an uneducated people".<sup>11</sup> It appears strange that the British diehards apprehended so much trouble from the infant 'native' press at a time when there was hardly any scope for so-called 'political' discussion in it, and when it commanded very little people's support "ranging considerably under a hundred to perhaps two hundred subscribers".<sup>12</sup> But the national press, once born, could not be strangled, and it began to grow in popularity as it grew in years. By the time Rammohan Roy braved the hazards of a voyage to England in 1830, it had grown in its early adolescence, and been able to stretch its vision to the distant horizon of political freedom, if not the entire Indian people, at least for its new middle class' patrons.<sup>13</sup>

It was Rammohan Roy who laid the foundation of our national press in more than one national languages, Bengali, Persian and Hindi, in the twenties of the last century. Although he was not the editor of any paper, the bi-lingual Brahman Sebadhi, the Bengali Cowmoodee, the Persian Mirat, the tri-lingual Bangadoot and the English *Bengal Herald* (1829), were all directly sponsored and patronised by him. In all these enterprises he got the whole-hearted economic and moral co-operation of his close friend and associate Dwarkanath Tagore. He helped to raise the moral tone of the press above the level of the contemporary English periodicals, and tried to make his countrymen, irrespective of caste and class, conscious of their political, social and human rights. When Buckingham was deported to England for criticising a Government measure in his Journal and press restrictions were reimposed by Adam in 1823, Rammohan fought bravely in defence of a free press against the Act. He put forward a memorial to the Supreme Court of Calcutta for nullifying Adam's Press Regulations. Recalling his unique courage and patriotism on that occasion, one of his counsels remarked on his first death anniversary meeting in 1834 that "a man born and bred in Britain could not have come forward more completely heart and soul in support of that which was the cause of his country, that Rammohan Roy did in 1823".<sup>14</sup>

### III

The background for the next stage of development of our national press was provided mainly by the Young Derozians in the thirties and forties, and the social reform movement launched by Vidyasagar in the fifties. A large number of Bengali periodicals came out in this period of which the most important are the *Sambād Pravākar* (28 January 1831),



edited by Iswar Chandra Gupta ; the *Gynānweshan* (18 June 1831), edited by Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee and later by Rashik Krishna Mullick and Madhub Chandra Mullick ; *Sambād Purnachandroday* (June 1835), *Sambād Bhāskar* (March 1839), *Vidyādarshan*, (June-July 1842), *Tattwabodhini Patrika* (16 August 1843), *Sarbasubhakari Patrika* (August 1850), *Bibidārtha Sangraha* (September 1851), *Bangavidyā prakashika Patrika* (September 1855), *Māshik Patrika* (August 1854), and *Education Gazette O Saptahik Bārtābaha* (4 July 1856). The influential bi-lingual papers of this period are the Bengali-English *Bengal Spectator* (April 1842) and the Bengali-Hindi *Samāchār Sudhābarshan* (June 1854). The Bengalis, in this period, gave a new lead to English journalism also. *The Reformer*, published from the Bangadut Press in 1831, edited by Prasanna Coomar Tagore, the mouthpiece of the Young Derozians—*The Enquirer* (1831),—edited by Krishna Mohan Banerjea, the *Hindu Intelligencer*, founded and edited by Kashiprasad Ghosh in 1846 and the *Hindoo Patriot* founded in 1853, edited by Girish Chandra Ghosh and later by Harish Chandra Mukherjee and Kristodas Pal, are some of the outstanding English papers conducted by the new generation of Bengali intellectuals which set a new tone and standard of English journalism in Bengal.

Events of tremendous social consequence followed in quick succession in the thirties. In the very beginning of this decade, on 17 January 1830, the orthodox Hindus founded *Dharma Sabhā* under the immediate impulse of fighting out the Government order for the prohibition of Suttee ; on January 1830, the *Brāhmo Samāj* was firmly established in its new building at Jorasanko ; on 27 May 1830, the celebrated missionary Alexander Duff arrived at Calcutta with his wife to launch vigorously his campaign for conversion to Christianity ; on 19 November 1830, Rammohan Roy sailed for England. The young students of the Hindu College, under the inspiration of their young Eurasian teacher H.L.V. Derozio, became so vociferous about the evils of Hindu religion and society, and the urgent need of their reform, that even the liberal Hindus got panicky. Withdrawal of students from Hindu College began, and the young teacher Derozio was charged by the College Committee for inculcating these ideas against Hinduism among the young students of the Hindu College. Derozio was forced to resign on 25 April 1831. In the midst of this confusion the Christian missionaries succeeded in making converts to Christianity, Mohesh Chandra Ghose in August 1832, Krishna Mohun Banerjea in October 1832, Gopinath Nandi in December 1832 and Ananda Chandra Majumdar in April 1833. These conversions, though small in number, were in quality quite different from those among the backward castes and classes. These were the first baptisms that had ever taken place in India among the better classes who had acquired a good Western education. These became, therefore, the theme of conversation and discussion with every group of people, in every society, club and association, in every school, college and institution, and even



in every family circle. "Hundreds, or even thousands of Baptisms among the low caste, or no caste, or illiterate grades, generally would not have excited a tithe of mental stir and inquiry then exhibited....."<sup>15</sup> When our society was thrown in the whirl of this wild confusion and facing a grave crisis, Rammohan Roy died in Bristol on 27 September 1833. The situation, therefore, drifted without control. The ultra-Radicals and their opponents the Conservatives dominated the scene, with the go-slow liberals, consisting mostly of Rammohan's associates, fudging in helplessly.

The wave of commotion grew less violent as days passed by, but the spirit of enquiry and discussion thus evoked continued to manifest itself in two ways. The first appeared in the formation of a large number of cultural societies and associations in which the urge for free discussion became a sort of mania, and its manifestation, both in frequency and variety, was often carried to bewildering excess. The second and the more important way in which the newly awakened spirit manifested itself, was through the medium of the press. And Charles Metcalfe stoked this fire of enthusiasm by liberating the Press from its shackles in 1835. Everything was favourable for the development of a healthy free press in our country. *Pravākar*, *Purnachandrodaya* and *Bhāskar*, published in the thirties, were all moderately liberal papers, tied neither to the Radicals nor to the Conservatives. Although the first two had never been consistently liberal in social matters like *Bhāskar*, they displayed much courage in criticising many administrative measures of the English, affecting the life of our people, and in voicing the economic grievances of the growing Bengali middle class. *Pravākar* possibly surpassed all its contemporaries in this criticism by making it pungently satirical, and *Bhāskar* excelled in vigorous style of writing and boldly progressive social views. But none could surpass the young radical group's *Gynanweswan* and the *Enquirer* in the freedom of criticism and the boldness of ultra-radical views. "A people can never be reformed without noise and confusion ; the absurd prejudices of the Hindus can never be eradicated without violent persecution against the reformers. We have undertaken this task" (*The Enquirer*).<sup>16</sup> This was the spirit which stimulated the writings of the young radicals. Against this the *Samāchār Chandrikā*, then a full-fledged organ of the orthodox Hindu Dharma-sabhaites, thundered vehemently, provoking the ultra-left to swing more violently to extremism. The *Reformer* of Prasanna Coomar Tagore had always been very sober in presenting its liberal views. That is why the overzealous radicals attacked it as 'half-liberal'. In the thirties the most interesting controversy in the press centred round the problem of social reform between the two wings or sects of progressives, called the half-liberal (The Rammohanites) and the ultra-radicals (the Derozians). What is more interesting is that a section of the English press, particularly the Bengal Hurkaru and the India Gazette, intervened in the situation and tried to persuade the 'ultra-radicals' to come to terms with the so-called 'half-liberals' and



fight unitedly against the conservatives. Criticising the ultra-left the India Gazette wrote: "Here as well as elsewhere there is a conflict going on between light and darkness, truth and error, and it is because we cannot fully approve of the temper and proceedings of those who have our best wishes that we now advert the subject, in the hope of leading them to a more correct appreciation of the circumstances in which they are placed, and to the adoption of better adapted means for the promotion of their object".<sup>17</sup> Supporting it the Bengal Hurkaru wrote: "We agree with our contemporary of the India Gazette that some of the Hindoo reformers in their abhorrence of superstitions have been in some instances carried away by the violence of their feelings into foolish extravagances and very idle bravadoes".<sup>18</sup> It pointed out that the angry and irritating discussions between the two sects in the press can do no good to either party and may seriously injure the cause which both equally profess to have at heart.

After about a decade (1827-28 to 1837-38) of social turmoil and tension, of angry bickerings and protestations, the atmosphere gradually cooled down in the forties. This was evident both in the formation of a qualitatively different kind of learned societies and in the appearance of a new type of national periodicals, in English and Bengali, sober in tone and content. The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge (16 May 1838) and the Tattwabodhini Sabha (6 October 1839) both were organised by the new generation of Bengali intellectuals, and their moral influence was much wider and deeper than that of the earlier Atmiya Sabha of Rammohan or the Academic Association of the young Derozians. The bi-lingual Bengal Spectator (1842), the Bengali Tattwabodhini Patrika (1843) and the English Hindu Intelligencer (184 ) were much superior in tone and style to their predecessors. The changed attitude of the Derozians was also manifest in the constructively progressive writings of the Bengal Spectator. The Tattwabodhini Patrika, with its elegantly forceful and rationalistic writings on religious and social reform, contributed mostly in the forties and fifties by Akshay Kumar Dutta and Pundit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, exerted overwhelming influence on the new educated Bengali middle-class. By the middle of the fifties the curve of social tension was again ascending, owing to the movements of widow remarriage (4 October 1855) and the prohibition of polygamy (27 December 1855) launched by Vidyasagar, and the subsequent legalisation of Widow Remarriage by the Act of 16 July 1856 and the first marriage performed under the Act on 7 December 1856. The social commotion produced by these momentous events, and the bifurcation of people's opinion on the break-up of such hoary customs and conventions, are amply reflected in the rich crop of writings in the contemporary national press and in the efflorescence of our national literature, mainly in satires and dramas.



#### IV

We have now arrived at the great turning-point of our history. The Sepoy Mutiny broke out in 1857 and the Indigo Disturbances in 1859-60. It would not be correct to say that these upheavals led suddenly to the birth of a national consciousness in the sixties, which gradually grew to maturity afterwards. Political consciousness does not flash on people suddenly, but it appears at first as a glimmer and then by degrees grows clearer and brighter. From the middle of the twenties to the end of the fifties two forces, mainly responsible for moulding the consciousness of people, were steadily gathering strength. One was the gradual spread of English education in different parts of India, and the other was the steady rise of the national press in English and Vernacular languages. The effect of the first was that the English language was welding the 'peoples' of different nationalities into one patriotic mass, with a community of feeling on Indian matters, by overcoming the barrier of provincial languages. The English press, conducted by the educated middle class in different provinces, paved the way for the emergence of an all-India national consciousness in the forties of the 19th century. The Vernacular Press, on the other hand, cleared the obstacles to the seeping down of this national consciousness from the upper sphere of the English-educated middle class to the ground-level of the masses. And although our national press, both English and Vernacular, was then most occupied with religious, educational, social and economic matters, and least of all with political, it cannot be denied that the consistent criticism of Governmental measures and policies on such matters, growing bolder and louder day by day, contributed much to the awakening of a national consciousness, based on the healthy mental habit of independent thinking. This is corroborated by the following evidence of Rev. James Long, a keen and intelligent observer of social events of his time, before the Indigo Commission of 1860 :

"But my own enquiries and duties have brought two causes prominently to my notice, as conducing to independence of mind among the masses ; first, English education, happily spreading in the country among the natives, in giving them a sense of freedom, leavening their minds with a regard to a sense of justice, and imparting to them an English tone of revulsion against oppression. It is also welding the natives of different Presidencies into one patriotic mass, with a community of feeling on Indian subjects. Thus a native of Calcutta, on a recent visit to Bombay, was enabled to address numbers of Parsees and Guzeraties in English ; though they knew nothing of each other's Vernacular. A pamphlet was published by a native in this city, some time ago, in English, and was reprinted by his countrymen in Madras and circulated widely. Madras and Bombay, like Calcutta, have newspapers in English, conducted by natives, and advocating the views of educated natives.

"The influence is radiating downwards. The substance of those



newspapers and pamphlets in English are being communicated orally or by means or translations to the masses of the people.

"The Vernacular press is rising into great importance, as a genuine exponent of native opinion, and it is to be regretted that the European community pay so little regard to its admonitions and warnings. It is the index of the native mind. In 1853, I visited Delhi, Agra and Lucknow, and particularly examined the statistics connected with the Vernacular press in the upper provinces, and I remember the impression with which I left Delhi after I had been through its lanes and gullies, exploring the localities of its Vernacular press. I felt then very strongly, how little the Europeans of Delhi and other cities were aware of the prodigious activity of the Vernacular periodical press, and the impression it was evidently producing on the native mind as tested by the avidity with which books, treating on native and political subjects, were purchased.

"The progress of the Vernacular press in Calcutta may be thus shown :  
Works printed for sale, were—

In 1826	...	...	8,000	} Copies
In 1853	...	...	300,000	
In 1857	...	...	600,000	

"Social questions occupy much of the attention of the Vernacular press ; thus the controversy on widow marriage gave rise to twenty-five different publications in Bengali. The subjects of early marriage and female education have also been amply discussed. . . . Bengali newspapers, such as the Bhaskar and Prabhakar are circulated widely, even as far as the Punjab, for wherever Bengalis go (the Bengali like the Jew, is a wanderer, and is to be met with in every part of Northern India) they keep up a correspondence with each other in their own language and read their native papers. Thus on a visit to Benares, three years ago, I was in a part, called the Bengali-tolla, inhabited almost entirely by Bengalis, who used the Bengali language. Two Bengali newspapers have mofussil correspondents, who give them the news of the district, and to each Bengali newspaper is attached a translator of English newspapers ; hence the native mind is much more familiarised with political movements both in Europe and India, than the Anglo-Indian commonly imagines. I take up the Bhaskar of last Thursday as a specimen of what is ordinarily given in a Bengali newspaper : there is an editorial on the Income Tax, in which the policies of Lord Auckland, Lord William Bentinck, Lord Hardinge, Lord Dalhousie and Runjeet Singh are reviewed ; then an editorial on Lord Clyde's leaving India ; then an article on Sir Charles Trevelyan and on the Raja of Burdwan ; then news about China and about the Indigo Commission ; the price currents, Assam steamers, Sir George Clerk, Gwalior, Oude, and Lady Canning. A Bengali paper is also published in the remote district of Rungpore ; the last number, for instance, contains offers of



prizes for Vernacular essays ; an editorial on the Moslem rule ; the Rajah of Kooch Behar's movements ; the Indigo Commission, and an article on gas.

"The amlas of the courts, the state of the police, the character of magistrates are constant subjects of criticism in these papers. I remember reading sixteen years ago, a series of powerful articles in the Bhaskar, exposing with most caustic wit the abuses of the courts.

"Now, to my certain knowledge, indigo planting has been for the last sixteen years the subject of incessant attacks in those native newspapers, and the opinion of those papers filters down to the mass".<sup>19</sup>

The evidence of Rev. James Long has been quoted at length for its obvious bearing on our subject. Even a casual perusal of the Bengali periodicals in the fifties will confirm his statement that although the Vernacular Press was then devoting itself to social questions, yet its fearless, critical tone was loud enough to echo down to the common people and make them conscious of their right to think and speak freely on the actions of an alien ruler. Of course, the seed of political consciousness thus sown took time to sprout out. In fact, throughout the decades after the fifties till about the end of the 19th century, the seedling of our nationalism remained fragile and required cautious caressing.

The political limitations of our national press were set by the interest of the newly propped-up aristocracy and the rising commercial and educated middle-classes. It was financed and controlled by them and the editors were free to move only within the field fenced by the financiers. When Harischandra Mukherjee, the editor of the famous Hindoo Patriot, was asked by the Indigo Commission, "You are the Editor of the Hindoo Patriot?" he replied, "I do not hold myself the responsible editor of the paper, but I have sufficient influence with the Proprietor to make him adopt any tone of policy I deem fit". In reply to another question, "What general line of advice you gave to the ryots who applied to you for it?" he said, "I invariably advised them to apply to the district authorities in the proper form of redress, and to go to the next appeallate authority if they found no redress at the hands of the district authorities. I cautioned them against ever committing any breaches of the peace, or committing themselves in any manner by acting illegally". The reply is significant. The control of the political rudder, which is 'loyalty' to the English rule and 'peaceful' ventilation of grievances, was never lost by the Hindoo Patriot even in the midst of its valiant fight in defence of the ryots' interests and against the tyranny of the planters. Pravākar and other Bengali papers also followed the same policy. It was for this reason that the rebels, during the Sepoy Mutiny, could not evoke any sympathetic response from our national press. It is true that the press then was put under severe restrictions by Canning. But that is no reason why it should go over to enumerating the benedictions of British rule and crying down frantically the mutineers as a lump of social rabble. But this was done by almost all the papers and periodicals of the time, without



exception, because the middle-classes were not then ready to tolerate any open revolt against the English rulers.

## V

This middle-class nationalist consciousness was strengthened in the sixties and seventies, and its associational base was broadened from the Landholders' Society of 1837, through the Bengal British India Society of 1843 and the British Indian Association of 1851, to the Indian Association of 1876. It was flowing through other channels also like the Patriot's Association (1865), the Hindu Mela (1867) and the Students' Association (1875). The Brahmo Samaj movement became a potent and living force in this period, under the dynamic leadership of Keshub Chandra Sen. It was Keshub who first made use of the platform for public addresses and revealed the power of oratory over the people's mind. Surendranath Banerjea, Ananda Mohan Bose, Sivanath Sastri, Motilal Ghose and others were drawn into the new social milieu and they tried to give it a nationalist form and content. The Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act (1878) during Lytton's regime, the Ilbert Bill and the Contempt Case against *The Bengalee* in 1882-83, provoked widespread national agitation. A chorus of protest was raised by the press, and the movement by speeches and writings in platform and press, rose to its peak in the early eighties. In the middle of this decade, in 1885, the Indian National Congress was founded.

In the social field, as in the political, profound changes were taking place. The Brahmo movement under the leadership of Keshub Chunder Sen and the Temperance movement under the leadership of Peary Churan Sircar, were creating deep impressions on young minds. The schism in the Brahmo Samaj, owing to the marriage of Keshub's daughter with the Maharaja of Coochbehar, bypassing the Civil Marriage Act III of 1872, of which he was himself the architect, had serious social repercussions. The most precious contribution of Brahmoism, a liberalised educated thought in social and religious matters, was openly challenged by an extreme Hindu orthodoxy. The fight between the early Brahmos and the Dharma-sabhaites in the thirties was now taken over, as a kind of social legacy, by the neo-Brahmos and the Hindu revivalists. What is historically more significant is that the cause of these Hindu revivalists was morally reinforced by the pro-Hindu political trend then prevailing. The new nationalism, as it was predominantly led by the educated Hindu middle-class, was being reared up in the cradle of a resurgent Hinduism.

The national press in Bengal faithfully portrays this social picture in the second half of the 19th century. The social and political movements of the period gave fresh impetus to journalism. The old Hindoo Patriot was "then the leading Indian paper in Bengal, under the editorship of that prince of Indian journalists, Kristo Das Pal", exercising great



influence over the educated middle-class and the Government.<sup>20</sup> *The Indian Mirror*, founded by Keshub Chunder Sen in August 1861, quickly rose to fame and popularity for its liberal social and political views. *The Bengalee*, founded in 1862, was turned into a powerful weapon of political propagandism under the editorship of Surendranath Banerjea from January 1879. The weekly *Brahmo Public Opinion* (1878) had considerable hold on a section of young Brahmos at the time. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, first published as a Bengali weekly from Amrita Bazar village in Jessore district on 20 February 1868, was issued as a bi-lingual English-Bengali weekly from Calcutta in the early seventies. When Lytton's Vernacular Press Act was passed on 14 March 1878, it was converted into a full-fledged English weekly from 21 March 1878.<sup>21</sup> Two English weekly papers, having considerable influence, were added to these in the eighties, the *Reis and Rayyet*, founded and edited by Sambhu Chunder Mookerjee in 1882 and the *Indian Nation*, founded and edited by N. N. Ghosh in 1883.

While some of the old veterans were continuing their existence, quite a number of new Bengali periodicals appeared in the field during this period. Of these the weekly *Somprokāsh*, first projected by Vidyasagar and published on 15 November 1858, "attained the foremost place among the Bengalee newspapers". Pundit Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan, an inhabitant of Changripota village in 24-parganas (now Subhasgram), wherefrom the paper was regularly published from April 1862, "taught his native brethren of the journalism craft a new style of journalism".<sup>22</sup> It was followed by the *Sulava Samachar* in November 1870, the *Bangabasi* in December 1881 and the *Sanjibani* in April 1883. These three Bengali weekly papers held sway in the social and political field of Bengal in the last quarter of the 19th century. Two Bengali monthly periodicals, the *Bangadarshan* (April-May 1872), founded and edited by the famous novelist and intellectual Bankim Chandra Chatterji, and the *Bharati* (July-August 1877), edited by Dwijendranath Tagore, Swarnakumari Debi, Rabindranath Tagore and others, became the harbinger of the new literary and cultural renaissance in Bengal.

The *Sulava Samachar* was a weekly pice paper under the management of the Indian Reform Association, founded by Keshub Chunder Sen after his return from England, in November 1870. It was the first enterprise of its kind in India, and it created a great sensation, meeting with an unprecedented success. Keshub's friends and associates, regardless of their social position, started hawking the paper from street to street, and by the end of the seventies its circulation rose to 5,500 copies, compared to Education Gazette's 1168 copies and *Somprokāsh*'s 700 copies. The bi-weekly *Bangamitra* (Calcutta) and the monthly *Bhārat Sramajibi* (Baranagar) had each a circulation of 4000 copies, although the 'dailies' then existing could not exceed an average circulation of 600 copies. The 'weekly' was then the most widely read paper, not the 'daily'. The novelty and success of *Sulava* stimulated imitations, till the *Bangabāsi* was started by Jogendra Chandra



Basu as a 'cheap' paper, followed by Krishna Kumar Mitra and others of the *Sanjibani*. In the middle of the eighties the *Bangabāsi* went to the top with a circulation of 12,000 copies, and by the middle of the nineties it leapt over to 20,000 copies, quite a formidable figure for a Bengali weekly in those days. Other weekly papers like the *Banga-nibasi* (8000 copies), the *Samaya* (4000 copies) and the *Hitavadi* (3000 copies) were making headway in the closing decade, but none had been able to reach the level of *Bangabasi*'s popularity. We shall come to the meaning of this trend of circulation later.<sup>23</sup>

## VI

So long all the newspaper printers and publishers had congregated in Calcutta, to the detriment of political and intellectual life in the country at large. In the decades following the Mutiny, printing of books and publishing of periodicals in Bengali language became widely diffused to the great benefit of the political and cultural life of the rural people. Not only printing and publishing greatly increased in Calcutta, but presses were set in many other district towns and villages. A good number of periodicals came out, of which the *Sādhārani* of Chinsurah (Hooghly), the *Grāmbārtā Prakāshikā* of Kumarkhali (24-Parganas), the *Bhārat Mihir* of Mymensingh, the *Dacca Prakāsh*, the *Hindu Hitaishini* and the *Garib* (Poor) of Dacca and the *Grambāsi* of Uluberia (Howrah) commanded good local circulation. In 1877-78 the *Bhārat Mihir* and the *Sādhārani* had an average circulation of about 600 copies each. In 1889-90 in Dacca town the *Garib* had a circulation of 3,000 copies and the *Dacca Prakāsh* 1200 copies, and about 800 copies of the *Grāmbāshi* were sold in a backward village like Uluberia in Howrah. Writing on the importance of village papers, the *Grāmbārtā Prakāshikā* pointed out on 5 July 1884: "The educated classes have learnt to discuss political questions from their contact with Englishmen. But how many in a population of 7 crores can boast of English education? The educated natives have indeed made great agitation on such subjects at the Ilbert Bill, the Arms Act, the Licence Tax, and so on. But do the mass understand them? The failure of these agitations plainly shows that they do not. The brag of a few town papers is worth nothing at a time when the village people have no mouthpiece, have no leader, and have no means of expressing their ideas". The grievance of *Grāmbārtā* is just and reasonable, but there is no doubt that by the middle of the eighties village people were definitely having their mouthpiece for expressing their own ideas.

Even a cursory analysis of the circulation trend of leading Bengali periodicals in the period under review, reveals that the lead given by Keshub's neo-Brahmoism in the social and political field was usurped, before long, by the Hindu revivalists. The astonishing popularity of the *Bangabāsi* clearly indicates the ideological triumph of Hinduism over all



other current thoughts and ideas. The new nationalist movement, and the consciousness it was generating, was going willy-nilly the Hindu way. The religious spell of Sri Ramakrishna, and the irresistible dynamism of Swami Vivekananda, the idol of young Bengal after Keshub, swept all obstacles away from its path of progress. Neither the resolutions, nor the aims and objects, of the Indian Association or the Indian National Congress on Hindu-Muslim unity and equality, could divert this drift to wider channels. The educated Muslim middle-class could not then emerge with sufficient strength to march side by side with the Hindus. The Muslim press also was then lagging far behind the Hindu press. Except *The Moslem Chronicle* and the *Mohammadan Observer* (1866) and the later *Mohammadan Observer* (1882), there was no other periodical worth mentioning, voicing Muslim demands at the time. This rift in the early history of our nationalism gradually widened as the educated Muslim middle-class grew stronger and stronger. And we had to pay for this early rift heavily with a later 'Divided India'.

The history of our press further reveals that our nationalism, at least in its formative period in the second-half of the 19th century, had persistently clung to the ideal of middle-class wish-fulfilment. It was growing more and more indignant through the decades against the pernicious policies and measures of British Government, but never had the idea of gaining complete freedom from foreign rule, even by so-called constitutional means, been ventilated through its columns. Writing about the trend of the press in 1880, Richard Temple observed: "Of the Native newspapers published in the English languages, as yet few in number, some are distinguished by loyalty and good sense as well as by cultivated ability, and are creditable products of the new education; as for instance, the 'Hindu Patriot' of Calcutta. Others are notable for a latitude of criticism which though extreme, does not transgress the limits ordinarily claimed for journalism. Of the vernacular newspapers, which are much more numerous, many are signally and consistently loyal, while preserving independence in their thought and freedom in their criticism. Others again have been disfigured occasionally by writings which, though not actually seditious or treasonable, are objectionable in their political tendency and likely to have the effect of causing ill-feeling against British rule, whether that effect is intended or not."<sup>24</sup> Temple's observation calls for serious attention in the sense that he should have no interest in minimising the anti-British nationalist character of our press. It is better to illustrate our point with some examples of press comments on relevant subjects of the time.

When Northbrook was the Viceroy of India (1872-76), he tried his best to lighten the burden of taxation on people. He vetoed the Bengal Municipal Bill, and refused to reimpose the income tax. A report of a public meeting held at Jayarampore village in support of Northbrook's action was published in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 20 February 1873. After the



meeting was over, songs of joy with drums and cymbals were sung in the streets. The theme of the song was this :

Sound the name of Hari with the joy of love.  
 This is an auspicious day, O Ye subjects.  
 From the burden of Municipal tax,  
     being compassionate to his subjects,  
 The Lord Sahib, the abode of great virtues,  
     has set us free.  
 Let us all with one mind offer unceasing prayer  
 That Shyam, the son of Sri Nanda,  
     would preserve him in happiness.

The same paper reports the theme of a play, called 'Mother India', staged at the National Theatre of Calcutta. It was this: "Mother India was represented as sitting gravely with her left cheek resting on her left hand, her face beautiful but sad. Her sons, emaciated for want of food, were lying asleep by her side. They awoke, asked for food and wept. Mother India said, 'the Goddess of Fortune, Lakshmi, has forsaken me, I cannot offer you anything'. The sons replied, 'what can we do then? We have no opportunity for trade, industry, or employment'. Mother India urged them to appeal to the Queen. When they were doing that, an Englishman suddenly came and kicked them out brutally. Mother India cried, 'O Harish, O Girish, O Ramgopal, whither have you gone?' Then another Englishman came, rebuked the former Englishman and consoled the Mother saying that the Queen will grant her prayer. Northbrook would remove all her sorrows and sufferings as Queen's representative in India." This drama was staged in 1873 in the National Theatre of Calcutta.

In 1878 the Sādhārani wrote: "We can assure our Government of our unflinching loyalty to the British rule; and warn them that they will but injure their own interests by ignoring public opinion as expressed in the newspapers".<sup>25</sup> The assumption of Ripon's viceroyalty (1879-84) was to some extent a relief to the Indian people after the reactionary administration of Lytton (1876-79). One of his earliest acts was the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act. He also introduced democratic principles into the municipal administration of our country by making the constitution of the Local Boards and the Municipalities broad-based on the elective system (October 1881, May 1882). At the end of his viceroyalty, India was convulsed by an unprecedented explosion of racial feeling, ignited by the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill, brought forward by the Law Member Sir Courtenay Ilbert in 1883. By the existing law, no Indian judge could try a European on a criminal charge except in the Presidency towns. Now that a certain number of Indians were going up to the higher ranks of the Civil Service, it was necessary to empower them with the same rights and privileges as those enjoyed by their European colleagues. This provoked a loud protest among the indigo planters who, together with the English



mercantile community of Calcutta, started agitation against Ripon. The controversy spread to England and was taken up by the press and in parliament. A European Defence Association was started and one lakh and fifty thousand rupees were subscribed towards it. Eventually Ripon had to yield to the pressure of the European vested interest and the bill was amended so as to give Europeans the right of trial by a jury half of whom must be European, in criminal cases.

This ill-judged anti-Indian agitation of the Europeans, directed against Ripon, made him a popular hero in Indian eyes, and extraordinary demonstrations of affection took place at the time of his retirement in December 1884. "His journey", says Meredith Townshend, "from Simla to Bombay was a triumphal march such as India had never witnessed—a long procession in which seventy millions of Indians sang hosanna to their friend". Ripon had done nothing, had taken off no tax, had removed no burden, had not altered the mode of government one hair's breadth. Then why this affection was shown to him? It was shown because, "he was only supposed to be *for Indians and against Europeans*, and that sufficed to bring every Indian in a fervour of friendship to his side" (emphasis added).<sup>26</sup> The Bangabāsi wrote: "Is there nothing to learn from these unheard of demonstration? Demoniac Englishmen! Worshippers of brute force! Learn good policy from this. Prove that you possess true humanity, by restraining despotic propensities. India is not yours. You are not come here to ruin her. India belongs to the Indians. Lord Ripon with the heart of a God has by the greatness of his soul done that which lakhs of bayonets have failed to do."<sup>27</sup> This agitation strengthened the forces which speeded up the birth of the Congress movement. Before the year was out the first National Conference was held in Calcutta (December 28-30, 1884). "It was the reply of educated India to the Ilbert-Bill agitation, a resonant blast on their golden trumpet."<sup>28</sup> In the next year the Congress was born.

The Indian press in general, and the Bengali press in particular, had emerged in one generation after Mutiny, from an obscure position, into an organ of great power. Lytton's Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, the Ilbert Bill agitation in 1883-84, and other measures had had their effect in galvanising the press into fresh life. By the middle of the eighties, after the birth of the National Congress, the press was recognised as a kind of constitutional opposition, and as days passed by the increasing importance of this recognition was assured. But the Congress could not set the limits of this 'constitutional opposition' to the press, which went along its own way with remarkable courage and independence of thought. At the second session of the Congress, held in Calcutta in 1886, the Chairman W. C. Bonnerjee asked his audiences, "Would it have been possible even in the days of Akbar for a meeting like this to assemble, composed of all classes and communities, all speaking one language? Such a thing is possible under British rule, and British rule only." The Congress urged then for the enlargement of the Legislative Councils and wider opportuni-



ties for admission to the higher ranks of the Indian administration. It was dominated in its early days by the moderate outlook of the upper strata of the educated and commercial classes. The Government also went a great way at the time in satisfying its demands by modifying the Indian Civil Service regulations in 1886, and by enacting the Legislative Councils Act of 1892. But the press was not satisfied with these crumbs of concessions. A large section of it grew restive with the moderatism of the Congress. It soon appeared, in Bengal particularly, that a section of the press was drifting towards extremism and becoming bitterly critical of the Congress policy. It was no longer possible for the press in Bengal in the nineties to assure the British rulers of its "unflinching loyalty" as was done by the *Sādhārani* and others in the seventies. In 1890 even the *Uluberia* weekly *Grāmbāsi* pointed out sarcastically that there was no necessity of watching the movements of "the Congress delegates, because the Congress was a thoroughly loyal movement and the Congressists were a thoroughly loyal people."<sup>29</sup> In 1895 the *Bangabasi* wrote: "We, the English educated people, demand that the English government should appoint us to all high posts in the public service, and think that as soon as we secure all the posts we become free, for freedom consists in securing high posts in the public service. Now the 'friends of India', that is the Englishmen who are patrons of the Congress, are very shrewd men and know which way the wind blows. They have taken a select few of the most advanced of the English educated Indians into their confidence. Patting them in the back, they say, 'Bravo, my dear boys, Bravo! We the English people only want the spread of commerce and the extension of territories. You, the English-educated Indians want liberty, and employment in the public service. So let us make a bargain. You hold Congress meetings and agitate and we make money.'"<sup>30</sup> It is evident from this criticism that the germ of our nationalism had already sprung into adolescence. The Congress was lashed by the press to shake off its infantile illusion of having freedom under the British tutelage, and to break away from its upper-middle class fold.

Events that led to the strengthening of this will to freedom began to move faster in the closing years of the last century. The complete failure of the monsoon in 1896 plunged the heart of India into the most horrible famine even then known under British rule. By the spring of 1897, over 40,000,00 people were involved and the mortality was very heavy. A new epidemic broke out in the shape of bubonic plague in Bombay in 1896, and injudicious official measures employed in the house-to-house searching and evacuation of premises, led to rioting and the murder of two British officers in Poona. The murderer Damodar Chapekar was subsequently executed. The whole of Western India simmered with angry disapproval of the measures taken by Government. The deportation of the Natu brothers, prominent sirdars of Deccan, and the trial and sentence of Bal Gangadhar Tilak on a charge of inciting to disaffection in his newspaper, the *Kesari*, were other events which quickly followed. In 1898 the section of the



Penal Code relating to seditious writing was amended so as to curb the turbulence of the press. But, despite the Penal Code, the wave of discontent began to foam through the columns of newspapers, from Bengal to Maharashtra. Even the educated middle-class was now beginning to claim self-government as a right. Gokhale, in his evidence before a Royal Commission in 1897, gave spirited expression to this view: "A kind of dwarfing or stunting of the Indian race is going on under the present system. The moral elevation which every self-governing people feels cannot be felt by us". The unanimity of the press was as marked as the increase of its influence. Its tone was not only negatively critical, but positively assertive, and the same tone characterised its utterances in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Poona, Lahore and Lucknow. All are identical in their spirit and in their common object, aiming and converging at the formation of a single national ideal—the birth of a new India and a free India. In the midst of this troubled atmosphere, which was further aggravated by Curzon of Kedleston, the nineteenth century drew to its close. When the twentieth century dawned, the morning glow of a new and free India was clearly visible through the political storm-clouds.

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## AGRARIAN ECONOMY AND AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN BENGAL 1859-1885.

The two marginal years of the period were the years of two outstanding pieces of agrarian legislation—the Rent Act X of 1859 and the Tenancy Act VIII of 1885. The two acts were landmarks in the agrarian history of Bengal, but this chapter deals with many things else besides. In view of the impracticability of any scheme of periodisation in respect of most of these, I did not strictly keep within the limits of my period.

The title of this chapter indicates its scope. It has no pretension to the comprehensiveness of what may be called an agrarian history of Bengal. A serious limitation is the exclusion of the ideology of the agrarian society—its religious and ethical beliefs, the prevailing notions about rank, status and class, and the assumptions which accounted for the preference for certain institutions to the exclusion of others. For instance, to most non-Indian civilians in Bengal, the expenditure by zamindars of an enormous sum on religion, numerous social ceremonies and the maintenance of a large number of favourites seemed entirely irrational. The civilians' criterion of rationality was the desirability of managing landed estates as a business involving necessary conversion of the surplus income from the estates into capital as a means of gradually augmenting this income. But such a norm was unacceptable to most zamindars. They had acted according to their convictions about the most desirable form of the consumption of their income, and these convictions derived from their cultural *milieu*, their status consciousness and their concept of the ideal relations between them and their dependants.

The paper is mostly concerned with the main trends of changes in the agrarian economy and the agrarian relations in the period under review. Where it has not been possible for me to trace any remarkable change, I have only analysed the existing system.

### EXTENT OF CHANGE IN THE TECHNIQUE OF CULTIVATION AND IN RELATED PROCESSES.

Agriculture can be defined as 'man's transformation of the rural environment' and 'the stage of development of any rural economy can be estimated by noting the degree to which the natural environment has been changed, and the techniques employed to this end.'<sup>1</sup> Judged by this criterion, agriculture in Bengal was largely stationary. The only notable change in the technique of production was the increasing use of a new iron mill for crushing sugarcane, known as the Beheea mills after a Sahabad estate whose proprietors Thomson and Mylne invented it. The indigenous mill *kolhu* (stigmatised by the inventors of the new mill as 'the barbarous and wasteful method of cane culture') consisted 'essentially of a large wood-



en or stone mortar in which a huge wooden pestle is made to revolve by the traction of a pair of bullocks. . . . The cane is cut up into short strips, which are placed in the mortar, and are crushed by the pestle as it rolls over them'.<sup>2</sup> The new mill was superior in many ways. It completely eliminated the element of danger to the life of the bullock driver and of the man filling in the canes which the sudden breakage of the pestle of the old mill involved. It could crush nearly three times as many sugarcane as the old one, and that more efficiently. The juice extracted by the new mill was far purer and cleaner, and the yield of sugar was higher by nearly 25%. Thomson and Mylne found that the new mill recommended itself to peasants mainly as a labour saving device in the beginning. It could be worked by a single bullock and saved the labour of at least one man, since the canes need not have been cut up into pieces but were pressed whole.

The invention took long to be popular among peasants. The inventors themselves sent instructors to villages to show the peasants how to operate the mill. Enterprising zamindars, managers of wards' estates, indigo planters and even some village moneylenders had a role in popularising it. The old mill was gradually being, in fact, priced out of the market. With time the new mill became so popular that Thomson, Mylne & Co. had to ask for a better legal protection for their invention from fraudulent imitations.<sup>3</sup>

District officers reporting on the sugarcane cultivation invariably related its rapid extension in recent years to the increasing use of the new mill.

The methods of water supply, which constituted the foundation of all agricultural operations, also improved to some extent, but the improvement did not go far enough. The new system of artificial irrigation could scarcely cope with the increasing needs of peasants. The Bengal districts having a heavier rainfall were in a position of greater advantage than the Bihar ones. But even here with increasing pressure of population necessitating cultivation of marginal lands, peasants had to rely on artificial irrigation. Haig, Chief Engineer, Irrigation Branch of the Public Works Department, thus writes of the metropolitan district of Hugli: 'There is not a single river, drainage, water course or channel of any description, large or small, in the whole district that is not bunded across at frequent intervals, from one end to the other for the purpose of storing water; not a pool, puddle or water hole the right to which is not jealously guarded. It is almost incredible the amount of labour and effort thus expended. . . to secure as far as possible every drop of the precious element'!<sup>4</sup>

The existing large irrigation works, mainly used for rice cultivation, in the Bihar districts of Gaya, Sahabad, Patna etc. are evidence of the collective enterprise in fighting aridity. Grierson thus explains the origin of these works in Gaya.<sup>5</sup> Artificial irrigation had to provide the abundant water supply indispensable for the cultivation of rice; particularly in two seasons—in June-July during the period of transplantation and again in September-October when grain was being formed. The soil, stiff and



clayey, could not retain moisture from rain water. The strong slope of the district from south to north, averaging about 4 feet to the mile, added to peasants' difficulty. Rivers were not of much use. With wide sandy beds they were nearly dry during a large part of the year. In flood time they were full, but because of the rapid slope water was quickly carried off. The most widely prevalent device of the rural community for storing water and using it whenever necessary was known as *ahar* and *pain*. An *ahar* was a reservoir for water formed on the highest land in a village so that whenever irrigation was needed water could be made to flow down the slopes. *Pains* were artificial channels of water to fill the *ahar*. Wells too provided a considerable part of the necessary water supply, particularly in south Bihar. The well irrigation, however, was mostly confined to cash crops like sugarcane, poppy, vegetables etc.

It was a common complaint, both by peasants and Government officers, that zamindars, customarily responsible for the maintenance of the large irrigation works, were unmindful of their duty and that the bursting of the ill-kept embankments often damaged the rice crop. Government officers explained this negligence on the part of zamindars by the constant feuds between co-sharers of joint estates which abounded in Bihar. Oldham, Collector of Gaya, went as far as to propose a special legislation to enforce these obligations of zamindars.<sup>6</sup> The number of wells increased, particularly in the poppy growing regions. A more liberal policy on the part of Government would have resulted in considerably adding to the number. The assistance by Government was in the form of a loan, hedged in with a number of formalities. Even this small assistance was withdrawn whenever Government decided to reduce the extent of poppy cultivation. In view of the smallness of the margin of profit from opium, peasants were not enthusiastic about the construction of new wells, unless they were indispensable for the very existence of the poppy plant. The existing property relations too was largely incompatible with peasants' initiative in this respect. Peasants could not construct wells, tanks etc. without the prior consent of zamindars, who discouraged these as far as possible apprehending that they would result in the consolidation of peasants' occupancy rights.

A new feature of the irrigation system was the direct role of Government in its extension, particularly in Midnapur, Orissa and the Sone area. The Orissa and Midnapur works, started in 1864 by the East India Irrigation Company, were purchased by Government in 1869 for a sum of £1,148,235. The Sone works too were projected by this Company, but Government took over before its construction had started. The Sone project of the Government owed its origin largely to its concern over the greater frequency of crop failures in Bihar in the recent years and to a conviction that it had a moral duty to counteract these. But such a feeling did not last long. In 1876 the Government of India refused to finance two irrigation schemes for north Bihar—Bagmati and Kamal project—despite the widespread crop failure caused by drought in 1875, and denied its obligation in fighting such droughts. Assuming that irri-



gation in Bihar, unlike in parts of the Punjab and Sind, was needed mostly when the autumn rain failed, the Government concluded: 'Irrigation works in Bihar will be in the nature of an insurance upon the rice crop of the province, which insurance ought to be defrayed by those who obtain a profit from that crop, mainly by the landed proprietors'.<sup>7</sup>

The Sone canal considerably contributed to agricultural productivity of the regions irrigated by it. The danger to crop from drought was largely eliminated. The safe reliance on the availability of the Sone canal water persuaded peasants to gradually substitute *Kharif* crops for *rabi*, the latter being more liable to be damaged by blight. The cultivation most stimulated by the Sone irrigation was that of sugarcane. In the Patna Division it increased from 1804 acres before the Sone irrigation to 22,000 acres in 1880.<sup>8</sup> As a means of irrigation, however, the Midnapur and Orissa canals were utter failures. Haig thus stated the official view: 'Six years after water was first offered to the people in Midnapur and Orissa, irrigation is now as far from general adoption as it was at first'.<sup>9</sup> It was only exceptional droughts which persuaded peasants to apply for canal water. Heavier rainfall in Midnapur than in the Bihar districts did not entirely account for this reluctance to use the canal water. The high canal rate was not a sufficient explanation either. In fact the firm refusal of peasants to use the canal water at a price fixed by the East India Irrigation Company and Government resulted in the gradual reduction of the rate. 'The process has gone on very much after the manner of a Dutch auction, the Company and their successor putting up the water for sale at a certain rate from year to year, and the ryots beating them down to a lower, until at last, in Orissa a rate has been reached only one-fifth of that originally demanded'.<sup>10</sup> The local officers of the Canal Department, particularly J. N. Mukherji, Deputy Revenue Superintendent of Canals, Midnapur who claimed an intimate experience of rural life, attributed the reluctance to what they called the poverty of ryots, meaning thereby that the size of peasants' surplus was not large enough to meet three demands—rent to zamindars, interest to moneylenders and the water rate to Government. Mukherji narrated how the success of one of these three groups caused disappointment to the rest: He writes: 'While collecting the last year's rent, I had invariably to watch and await the debtor's return from making the sale (of rice), and where we failed to catch hold of him the very day or the day following, he had nothing to pay'.<sup>11</sup> He writes elsewhere: 'Money kept for payment to the landlord is at once paid to the Government agent when he happens to come to the village before the zamindars' people made their appearance there, and the zamindar's agent, unless it was about any of the sunset days, always left the village in despair'.<sup>12</sup> The reaction of zamindars is not hard to imagine: 'The zamindars, whose resistance to the spread of irrigation was hitherto passive, has now broken out in action, and many of them have openly prohibited their tenantry from using the canal water on the penalty of incurring their severe displeasure'.<sup>13</sup> The number of peasants thus unable to use the



canal water because of their poverty was estimated by Mukherji at nearly 75% of the total peasant population.

#### MOVEMENT OF POPULATION AND ITS ROLE IN THE CHANGE IN THE AGRARIAN ECONOMY.

In the context of a more or less unchanged technique of cultivation any change in the units of labour power employed in agriculture would normally affect agricultural production. With an unchanged technique of production and a low one at that, the stage of optimum cultivation would be soon reached, and, assuming that there was yet a scope for extension of cultivation it could not happen to a notable extent without an increase in the total labour supply. It is almost true to say that stationariness of agricultural production, or rather agricultural production increasing only at the same rate as population is the characteristic mark of a peasant community. . . . In a real subsistence economy, it can almost be taken as a law of nature that agricultural production will increase at about the same rate as population."<sup>14</sup> A decline in population would adversely affect production. On the other hand, in the absence of any considerable scope for the extension of cultivation, the growth of labour power beyond a point where the input of additional units of labour would not result in increasing the total farm output would tend to reduce the per capita income in the peasant families.

It is necessary to qualify the model. Given a scope an extension of cultivation may sometimes occur without a corresponding increase in the supply of peasant labour. It may happen, as Myint<sup>15</sup> explains, where the available resources of peasants, including land and labour, remained hitherto underemployed as a consequence of the absence of incentive for their full employment but which peasants would employ more fully with new incentives, for instance, the rising price of agricultural produces. This undoubtedly happened at times in some parts of Bengal, particularly in the eastern districts, where a continuous rise in prices for a reasonable length of time was followed by an extension of cultivation to new areas. In fact peasants agreed to take up new lands on the condition that they reserved the right to give up their cultivation whenever prices returned to normal. Such cases were, however, exceptional.

A fundamental assumption of the following study of demographic changes in Bengal is that the peasant producers constituted the overwhelming majority of the population and that the general trends in the increase or decrease of population represented the trends in the increase or decrease of the peasant population.

The convenient starting point of the study would be 1872, since reliable population statistics for Bengal as a whole are available from that year onwards. We can identify four important trends in the population movement in Bengal till the end of the 19th century : a) a large increase in the industrial and urban population; b) a declining or a stationary popula-



tion in many parts of central, northern and western Bengal ; c) a rapidly growing population in most districts of eastern Bengal ; d) a period of growth followed by one of *diminishing* rate of growth and then by another of spectacular decline. The growth of the urban and industrial population as a factor in the expansion of the market for food grains will be discussed later.

The census statistics<sup>16</sup> show a decline in population in some well-known districts of Bengal proper. In Burdwan, Rangpur and Birbhum the decline in population was an established trend. In districts like Burdwan and Hugli the growth of industrial population largely made up for the losses in the agricultural sector. In Nadia and Jessore the increase in the first decade, as shown in our table, was only apparent and attributed by the Superintendent of the Census Operations to inaccurate enumeration. Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Murshidabad had a stationary population. Bankura was divided between progressive and decadent regions. In Pabna the first decade of growth contrasted with the decline in the subsequent decades, particularly in its western parts, and the decline was not arrested even in the long span of two decades after 1881. In some districts—the 24 Parganas, Maldah, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri—where census statistics show a striking growth in population, large scale immigration was mostly responsible for it.

It was the higher death rate caused by fever, variously known as the Burdwan fever or the Hugli fever, which accounted for the decadence in these regions. This fever was undoubtedly one of the outstanding events deeply affecting the agrarian society in Bengal throughout the second half of the 19th century. It was not a temporary phenomenon, like the plague in Bihar in the last decade of the 19th century or the influenza throughout the greater parts of India in 1919, disappearing for ever after a brief spell of terrible ravage. It broke out spasmodically, after short intervals, devastating rural Bengal, the periods of exceptional virulence being 1857 to 1864, 1866 to 1869, and 1871. Dr. Elliot, Civil Assistant Surgeon on Special duty to enquire into the fever, has left vivid accounts of the frightful ravages wrought by it. He thus stated what the tour of inspection in Hugli and Barasat revealed : "The deplorable state of some of those places can only be known by visiting them ; but as a general rule, the greater portion of villages in both districts are overgrown with jungle and brushwood, more particularly those in which fever has been prevalent for 3 or 4 years".<sup>17</sup> In the 21 villages in Hugli visited by him in 1862, he found that 'four-fifths of the population either have been or are affected, and fully 20% have died'.<sup>18</sup> As for the villages on the dried-up channels of Hugli, Pellew, Collector of the district, wrote : "To talk of decimation is seriously below the truth as applied to mortality in many, very many, of these villages. Hardly the tenth part is left alive".<sup>19</sup> Bourdillon, Deputy Superintendent of Census Operations in Bengal in 1881, estimated the toll in the Burdwan Division alone at two millions.<sup>20</sup> This is how Dr. Smith, Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal, wrote of the wrecks of human



beings who could survive the fever: 'On entering a large village one is immediately surrounded by poor, miserable, squalid creatures, with enormously enlarged spleens, hearts and arteries visibly pulsating and struggling under the influences of poisoned blood. It is almost impossible to imagine a more touching and saddening sight . . . . I do not think I exaggerate when I say that fifth-sixths of the children under 8 years of age have spleens four times as large as natural.'<sup>21</sup>

The origin of the fever was attributed to the excessive humidity of the sub-soil caused by obstructed drainage, which was mainly a consequence of changes in the course of rivers in the Gangetic plain.<sup>22</sup> Recent studies on the decline of population in Europe in some particular periods emphasise the correlation between the intensity of the diseases responsible for this decline and the deficiency of the existing food supply.<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to find that some Government officers, reporting on the fever in 1873-74, were inclined to the 'hunger' theory of fever 'common in Germany and Great Britain, and which was so largely accepted in Ireland in the post famine literature of 1848'.<sup>24</sup> The Magistrate of Burdwan was informed by one of the subordinate officers that "the class visited most severely by the fever has been the lowest class, that of the daily labourers, which class is also notoriously the poorest, the worst fed, clothed and housed."<sup>25</sup> J. Mukherji, Deputy Magistrate On Special Duty in connection with the Fever Enquiry, concluded: 'It may be said with tolerable accuracy that the well-to-do cultivators who could save capital escaped with comparative immunity, while those who lived from hand to mouth, the masses of cultivators, agricultural labourers, weavers, braziers, *sankaries*, potters . . . . died without number'.<sup>26</sup> Most local officers explained the falling living standard of the people by what they called the growth of population at a rate faster than that of the increase in agricultural production—an assumption which they did not care to substantiate. Some careful observers related the diminishing food intake to a diminishing food supply as a consequence of a decline in productivity in recent years and of an increasing export of food grains, 'the extraordinary rise in the prices of food crops and other necessities', increasing rent and a general increase in the cost of agricultural production.

The fever, considerably decimating the working population and draining off the vitality of the survivors, immediately reacted on agriculture. Scarcity of labour was a common phenomenon in the fever-stricken districts. 'Families which were full of robust, working heads and could very well spare many of them from their own fields to work for others, can now scarcely supply labour adequate to cultivate their own lands'.<sup>27</sup> In a paper read at a meeting of the Bengal Social Science Association in 1872 Peary Mohan Mukherjee, a zamindar of Uttarpara in Hugli, referred to the 'rare, perhaps hitherto unknown, spectacle of crops rotting in the fields or being destroyed by animal for the very want of the labour and means necessary to reap and store them'.<sup>28</sup> The low vitality of the survivors made them incapable of hard and strenuous labour that rice culti-



vation demanded. B. N. Mukherji, who was investigating the origin and effects of the fever in some selected villages in the district of Burdwan, notes a 'very curious fact that in four villages lying contiguous to one another, only one child has been born during the last two years'.<sup>29</sup>

The immediate reaction of peasants to such a situation arising out of scarcity of labour was to relinquish their holdings. Pellew, Collector of Hugli, reported 'wholesale abandonment by ryots of portions of their holdings or of all their lands'.<sup>30</sup> More than 2,000 peasants applied to the Collector of Hugli in a single month in 1872 for such relinquishments.<sup>31</sup> In many villages of Burdwan, *Kala* or *Dow* lands<sup>32</sup> 'were generally shunned owing to the labour which they require in their cultivation, unless they are in the neighbourhood of dwelling houses, or enjoy any facilities for irrigating them'.<sup>33</sup>

A considerable decline in cultivation naturally resulted, but official reports do not provide us with detailed statistics for precisely ascertaining its extent. B. N. Mukherji's Report on the Burdwan Fever<sup>34</sup> occasionally referred to the question. Out of 2,000 bigahs in the village Royan, 500 were left fallow. In the village Jowgram, 'a very large and populous village', the fever brought to an end the rapid reclamation of waste lands for four decades before 1874, and 'nearly a fourth of the good arable land in the village has for several years remained uncultivated. Hugli presented a similar scene. In the villages of the Pandua, Bansberia and Dhaniakhali police stations, which were once so densely populated that 'the residents had not even land enough to dry their parboiled paddy', one fourth of the land lay uncultivated. J. Mukherji<sup>35</sup> estimated the extent of fallow land at one-eighth of the total cultivation.

Contemporaries were agreed that a rise in the cost of cultivation, taking place simultaneously with the fever, made a recovery from this setback a protracted process. Apart from the rising rent and the increasing wages of labour they stressed the rise in the price of cattle, the rise ranging from 25% to 50%. The official report on cattle plague (1871) discussed the question in some details. The slaughter of an increasing number of cattle for providing meat to Calcutta and other growing urban centres, extensive cattle-poisoning by agents of persons or organisations connected with the increasing export trade in hide in the second half of the 19th century, the employment of a larger number of cattle in the expanding internal trade by land and the gradual deterioration in the breed of cattle tended to push up their prices. The most important role in this, however was that of the widespread cattle murrain in the sixties and the seventies. The ordinary death rate among cattle did not exceed 4% to 6% a year, but in times of these murrains the mortality was nearly 40% to 60%.

To these decadent districts in the western, central and northern Bengal the eastern Bengal districts, with a fast growing population, present a pleasing contrast.<sup>36</sup> The natural calamities sometimes checked this growth, but the resultant losses were soon made up for. The general absence of fatal diseases like the Burdwan fever, the greater resourcefulness of the eastern



Bengal peasantry, the greater scope for extension of cultivation, the higher birth rate among the Muslims who were more numerous than the Hindus in these districts, and a large immigration—all these explain the rapid growth of population there.

In the Bihar districts, as we have earlier pointed out, the general trend in the population movement was a rapid growth in the decade 1872-1881, a diminishing rate of growth in the decade 1881-1891 and a spectacular decline in the following decade.<sup>37</sup> The growth in the first decade was not, however, as substantial as it looks. The imperfect enumeration of 1872 resulted in the unusually inflated figure in the census of 1881. The ravages of fever accounted for the falling rate of growth in the next decade.

In the absence of any improvement in the technique of cultivation, the impact of population pressure had a more or less uniform pattern throughout Bengal—a search for new land causing movement of population from the densely populated regions to sparsely populated ones. This feature was also present in the decadent districts. Apart from the fact that there were still a number of overpopulated regions, the frequency of the recurrence of the fever, which dislocated the entire cultivation process when it broke out, persuaded peasants to flee this menace to secure cultivation and find out new lands. With the help of census statistics we can trace this process in almost every district of Bengal. But in view of limited space, we confine the study to only a few selected districts.

In Midnapur peasants moved away from the densely populated and low lying tracts in the north-east and centre of the district to the reclaimed *Jalpai* lands along the coast and tidal river in the west. In Birbhum peasants migrated from the less productive laterite areas, which were worse affected by the fever, to the more fertile western tracts. In the 24-Parganas the immense scope for new cultivation in the Sunderban area attracted peasants in larger numbers.

Thus while the percentage of variation for the whole district in 1891-1901 was 9.9, for some Sunderban regions it was as high as 41.9. In Rajshahi the scene of the peasant enterprise in extending cultivation was the Nawgong subdivision. The decline of silk manufacture drove peasants from the west and south of the district, which formerly specialised in the cultivation of mulberry, to the large swamp *chalan bil*, the reclamation of which was becoming increasingly attractive with the rising prices of food grains. The *Barind* tract, elevated and undulating, and fit to produce only the winter rice was another centre of growth and was being reclaimed mainly by immigrant labour. The migration of peasants to the areas producing *ganja* (a plant with narcotic properties) resulted in the phenomenal rise in population by 59.3% in the period 1872-1901. In Rangpur there has been a general movement of the population from the north and east to the south in search of healthier habitations and more suitable land, except where it has been arrested by the counter-attraction of the railway in the north-west of the district.<sup>38</sup> It was the eastern Bengal districts which wit-



nessed the most successful reclamation efforts of peasants. Apart from a fast growing population, the rising prices of food-grains and the expanding market for jute largely explain these efforts and the existence of a large scope for new cultivation on their success. As in other districts peasants were migrating to sparsely populated areas. In Faridpur the vast marsh in the south, mostly inhabited by the peasant community known as *Chandals*, was gradually being reclaimed by immigrant labour from the north. In Bakarganj 'the one governing cause of movement of population. . . is the flow of surplus population of the northern *thanas* to the waste lands in the south and the east.'<sup>39</sup> A distinct feature of the search for new lands in these districts was the greater concentration on the new alluvial formations. Despite the very small scope for extension of cultivation in many districts of Bihar we find the movement of peasants in search of new lands. In Muzaffarpur 'from 1881 to 1921 the centre of population shifted persistently towards the north.' The southern part was the oldest agricultural settlement. In Champaran the movement was towards the north.

The new lands were not necessarily more fertile or as fertile as the ones left by peasants. Particularly in Bihar, the new lands were invariably inferior and agriculture was much less secure there. These mostly produced only one crop—rice, the cultivation of which was most sensitive to changes in water supply. The loss of crop from the failure of seasonal rain or its maldistribution would leave the peasants utterly destitute. Yet if peasants had to stick to land as the sole means of subsistence, there was no other choice. Where even this precarious choice did not exist, they had to abandon cultivation altogether and migrate to other districts in search of new occupations—which formed a unique feature of the agrarian life in the districts of Saran, Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur. The other alternative was to accept the fate of an agricultural labourer, whose fortunes entirely depended on the state of harvests.

#### CHANGING PATTERN OF LAND USE : GROWTH OF CASH CROP CULTIVATION.

In the last section we have noted two important features of the impact of the variations in population on agriculture. First, a sudden reduction in the size of the labour force employed in agriculture, as in the fever-stricken districts, invariably resulted in the decline of cultivation. Secondly almost throughout Bengal, peasants were on the move in search of new land, which suggests that nearly everywhere, except in the decadent districts the existing extent of cultivation could not support a growing population. Whatever the variations in the extent of cultivation resulting from the variations in population, statistics show that, given the existing technique of cultivation, a very high percentage of the cultivable land in Bengal was fully employed.<sup>40</sup>

The pattern of land use was changing in our period. Apart from the changes brought about by the pressure of population, such as the exten-



sion of cultivation to the village commons resulting in the gradual disappearance of pasturage, increasing cultivation of marginal lands, shortening of the period of fallowing, intensive cropping, there was another significant change—growth of commercial agriculture, i.e., growth of the cultivation of cash crops. Though the cash crops occupied only a small fraction of the total cultivation, yet their cultivation process left a deep impact on the peasant economy and the general society.

The phrase 'commercial agriculture' is used here simply to mean that a certain portion of agricultural produces was marketed. We do not mean that this was invariably the result of an allocative efficiency of peasants, that peasants themselves were responsible for the production decision in this respect, and that the profits from the marketed produce entirely belonged to them. As we shall see later in this section, the commercial agriculture was a mere form of the subsistence agriculture itself functioning under particular historical conditions rather than a consequence of conscious response of peasants to the market stimulus. As for instance, the increase in the volume of marketed rice in our period did not result from any scheme of organising production for a larger profit from marketing the surplus. In fact the concept of 'surplus' was partly irrelevant in the context of the social organisation and of the particular agrarian economy in Bengal. Peasants had to surrender a portion of their produce for meeting customary communal obligations, particularly where the system of produce rent prevailed, even if this considerably reduced their usual subsistence fund. The particular form of the production organisation often resulted in the hypothecation of the entire rice crop to the moneylender-cum-graindealer, thus depriving the peasants of any control over the disposal of their crop. The size of the marketed rice was also determined by the quantum of rent. In normal circumstances the largest quantity of the marketed rice was composed of the post-harvest sale by peasants so that they could have ready cash to pay their rent. It was the basic requirement of the subsistence farming which primarily influenced the peasants' choice to continue growing poppy. Peasants were attracted to poppy mainly because of the advances given by the Opium Department. These advances were seldom used for financing the poppy cultivation itself, but were used up for paying rent. That is why in the poppy growing regions the periods of the several instalments of rent payment and the periods of the poppy advances invariably coincided. Even in the case of jute, where calculations of profit greatly influenced peasants' decision to substitute the crop for rice the role of the needs of a purely subsistence farming was present. Jute was an early crop, and the offer of jute advances at a time when the resources of peasants had nearly run out persuaded them to grow it. As regards indigo, the question of peasants' free choice was irrelevant, since its cultivation was forced. But while in most cases the entrepreneurial role was not that of peasants and their choice to grow cash crops was often determined by the requirements of their subsistence farming, other entrepreneurial groups were in a position to organise produc-



tion for the market for profit. This happened, however, without creating a distinct commercialised sector where, taking the peasant family as the unit of production, the resources of certain families had been entirely devoted to the production of cash crops. Nowhere did peasants completely dissociate themselves from the cultivation of subsistence crops. Even in periods of an unusual expansion of the market for jute, the most profitable commercial crop of peasants, they did not devote more than one-third of their entire holdings to jute.

Apart from the particular circumstances contributing to the growth of the cultivation of different cash crops, which we shall discuss when we deal with individual crops, numerous developments in the second half of the 19th century greatly stimulated India's foreign and internal trade in general—a trade largely consisting of raw materials and agricultural produces.<sup>41</sup> The pace of industrial growth in some nations in the continent of Europe was far quicker in this period than at any time before, resulting in the increased demand for raw materials. In the world economy itself, as Knowles<sup>42</sup> has pointed out, new trends were visible about the year 1870. 'The period of world economy which means world production, world interdependence and world rivalry may be held to date from 1870, by which time railways and steamships were developed in England, France, Germany, and the U.S.A. to a point where their means of communication were revolutionised.' New developments tended to make quicker, easier and broader the commercial contact of the industrial west with the sources of raw materials, including India. The opening of the Suez Canal (1869), synchronising with the fast growth of steam navigation, revolutionised the east-west trade. Telegraphic communications between England and India since 1855 further broadened this contact by making possible a more accurate and quicker study of the demand and supply position and of other related phenomena. The liberalisation of the tariff policy, particularly after 1867, by the Government of India by abolishing or reducing export duties on very many commodities, and the gradual reduction of ocean freight also contributed to the expansion of India's foreign trade. These developments affected not only the volume, but also the commodity composition of this trade. It was no longer practically confined to 'drugs, dyes and luxuries', and now included in increasing quantities food grains, fibres and other great staples of universal consumption. The development which contributed most to the growth of internal trade was the gradual extension of railways and other improvements in communications.

The trade in rice itself, the main subsistence crop, remarkably expanded. The absence of adequate statistics regarding the intradistrict and the interdistrict movement of rice makes inconclusive any study of the actual dimension of the expanding trade. So we take the export from the Calcutta port, of which we have accurate statistics, as an index of the general trends in the grain trade, though the export trade from Calcutta was by no means co-extensive with the entire rice trade of Bengal. The



trade had been steadily increasing. Its value rose from £ 200,000 in the mid-thirties of the 19th century to more than £4 million in 1864-65.<sup>43</sup> It had some periods of growth since then, though the rate of expansion varied in different periods.<sup>44</sup> One of biggest booms in the rice trade in our period was caused by the widespread famine in Madras and Bombay in 1876-77, which coincided with the larger than usual rice harvest in Bengal for two successive seasons. The volume of the export was so large<sup>45</sup> that despite abundant harvests the local reserve of food grain dwindled to insignificance, causing a popular outcry against the continuing export and an apprehension in the official circle that an acute scarcity would soon result. The sudden upward swing of the prices of rice confirmed this apprehension. With the disappearance of the famine conditions, the boom burst, with export and the price level soon returning to normal.

Numerous developments were stimulating the internal and the external trade in rice. The increasing size of the urban and industrial population was one. In Calcutta the population growth was very rapid after 1881. (The percentage of variation in the decades 1881-91 and 1891-1901 was 11.4 and 24.2 respectively.) In the Serampore sub-division, the most important industrial centre of Hugli, population rose by 40% in 1881-91 and by 24% in the following decade. In the industrial belt of Howrah there was a spectacular growth of nearly 88% in the period 1872-1901. Similarly, large was the increase in the Ranigunj subdivision of Burdwan. (In the Asansol *thana*, population rose by 13% in 1872-1901.) The expanding tea-industry in Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Chittagong and Assam employed an increasing number of immigrant labourers. A larger grain supply was thus necessary to feed this growing industrial and urban population. The role of the growth of the metropolitan demand in the expansion of rice trade is illustrated by the fact that of the total imports of rice into Calcutta, estimated at 20 million maunds in a normal year, 7 million were consumed by the metropolitan population.<sup>46</sup> The expansion of industries outside India but employing emigrant labourers from India had a similar role in the growth of Bengal's rice trade. The preference of these labourers for Indian rice accounted for a considerable export of Bengal rice to these regions. We can take, for instance, the growth of tea industry in Ceylon. Its usual dependence on the imports of Indian rice naturally increased to a considerable extent with the flow of Indian labourers, who were essential for the expanding tea industry. The export of tea from Ceylon rose from 162,575 lbs in 1880 to 7,849,888 in 1886.<sup>47</sup> The emigration of Indian labourers in larger numbers to the different sugar plantations in Africa and West Indies similarly necessitated the export of an increasing quantity of rice from Bengal. The extension of railways and the resultant improvement in communications had a big role in the development of the Bengal rice trade, particularly in view of the fact that most rivers were not navigable for more than 4 to 6 months a year. While investigating the prospects of an increasing trade with the construction of the proposed Northern Bengal Railway, the Commissioner of Rajshahi found that 'as



a rule. . . . for some 8 months of the year there is no natural outlet for the main productions of the country'.<sup>48</sup>

Of the non-food crops, the only important one whose cultivation had been continuously declining was mulberry. The Bengal silk trade, on the state of which its fortunes entirely depended, was passing through acute depression. The statistics of the market prices of Bengal silk<sup>49</sup> show that the crisis set in 1873-74. Excepting a short-lived spurt of prosperity in 1876-77, the descending spiral was not reversed since then. Bengal was increasingly losing its market to Italy, France, China and Japan. The Bengal trade recovered from the depression only when crop failed in these countries. Its prosperity over a fairly long period, 1864-65 to 1871-72, was entirely due to this.

Bengal was beaten undoubtedly by the superior technology of its rivals, by the application of a superior skill to the process of rearing cocoons and reeling. Local officers emphasised the role of a higher differential rent on the mulberry land in depressing the cultivation. The rent on mulberry land in Maldah, Rajshahi and Murshidabad was as high as Rs. 12 to 16 per bigha, while the rent on the ordinary rice land was only Re. 1-8 annas to Rs. 2. In 1886 Thomas Wardle, an authority on sericulture, proposed to the Government of India to investigate 'whether mulberry land rentals are not acting as a barrier against the extension and development of sericulture in Bengal'.<sup>50</sup> At a conference held in Calcutta in 1886 'there was evidently a decided feeling that the zemindars were killing the industry by exorbitant rents'.<sup>51</sup> There was also a feeling that a nearly monopoly control over the silk trade by three firms—Robert Watson & Co., Lyall & Co. and Louis, Payen & Co. enabled them to control the prices of cocoons and that the offer of low prices while the depression was continuing only tended to harden the resolve of the frustrated cocoon rearers to quit the occupation altogether.

Peasants continued growing mulberry despite risks of utter loss largely because the change over to other crops was at times a difficult process. Continuous tank silt dressings raised the level of the land so high that it was not ordinarily suitable for rice or jute. The crops that could be grown were potatoes, vegetables and sugarcane, but their cultivation was too expensive for peasants of ordinary means. Where this technical difficulty was not insuperable, mulberry cultivation was being thrown up.

A similar fate befell safflower, which had once an important place in the local peasant economy of Dacca. The discovery of aniline dye, a cheaper and a more efficient dying agent, made its existence superfluous. Other important cash crops prospered, with the exception of indigo the cultivation of which had been declining in the last decade of the 19th century. We confine our study to some major crops.

The cultivation of sugarcane remarkably increased, particularly in the last three decades of the 19th century. In the period 1884 to 1899 it had trebled.<sup>52</sup> It was mostly concentrated in the Bihar districts, of which Sahabad had the largest area under sugarcane,



The history of the growth of sugarcane cultivation had a striking feature. The growth in the first phase was entirely due to foreign demand, but in the last three or four decades of the 19th century it was entirely due to internal demand. By then Bengal was an importer of foreign sugar rather than an exporter. Bengal started exporting sugar to Europe on a large scale when the revolt in the sugar producing colonies of France during the French Revolution practically destroyed the sugar industry there, thus necessitating the import of the necessary quantity of sugar from a different source. Bengal partially provided it. In the eighties of the 19th century the foreign demand very nearly disappeared, the Bengal sugar having been priced out of the market by the cheap beet sugar from Germany. Even before the beginning of the beet sugar cultivation Bengal sugar could meet only a small part of the total European needs. It was no match for the West Indian variety. Its cultivation was much stimulated by the equalisation of duties (1836) of the Bengal sugar and the West Indian sugar. But even this badly needed fiscal measure did not provide a sound base for a viable system of sugarcane cultivation. An ambitious scheme for its extension in 1846 entirely fell through. Minden Wilson, who left Mauritius as a sugar planter with the idea of growing it in Bihar, called this sugar craze 'that golden dream that swamped so many good men in 1847-48'.<sup>53</sup> The craze thrived on a naive belief that because of cheap land and labour large fortunes could be made out of sugar. The entrepreneurs introduced expensive machinery without waiting to know more of the properties of the soil in Bihar, only to find, much to their disappointment, that the price of the manufactured sugar was scarcely enough to cover the cost of production. The brighter prospects of indigo at the time hastened the complete abandonment of this costly experiment. A new phase of expansion of the sugarcane cultivation began since then, but the predominance of European enterprise ceased. The two most important factors in this were the invention of the iron mill for crushing sugarcane and the new facilities for irrigation.

The history of indigo cultivation in the second half of the 19th century had three main features: its gradual decline in Bengal proper; a continuous expansion in Bihar till the mid-nineties and a rapid decline in Bihar too since then. Despite occasional reverses, particularly those caused by the failure of the Agency Houses (1830-34) and of the Union Bank (1847), which provided capital to the indigo planters, indigo cultivation continued to expand in Bengal till 1860—the year of indigo peasants' revolt. Its immediate impact was seen in the sudden fall in the indigo exports<sup>54</sup> in the following year. But the cultivation did not entirely disappear. Bengal continued to produce a little over one-third of what Bihar produced.<sup>55</sup> A new feature of the cultivation in Bengal was the increasing indigenous enterprise. The Commissioner of Rajshahi found that 'except in the districts of Murshidabad and Rajshahi, the business is now wholly in the hands of the natives, and carried on apparently with but little appliance of capital'.<sup>56</sup> The European enterprise tended to be con-



centrated in a few firms the most prominent of which were Messrs. R. Watson & Co. and Jardine, Skinner & Co. Capital was undoubtedly being withdrawn from indigo. 'Capitalists prefer investing their money in speculation like tea, which involves less risk and gives larger profits over a term of years than indigo'.<sup>57</sup> The cultivation under European enterprise was more and more confined to new alluvial lands and that on the high lands was gradually abandoned.

In Bihar, on the other hand, the cultivation was fast increasing.<sup>58</sup> Indigo had already a sound base there, particularly in the district of Tirhoot. Other circumstances were stimulating its growth since the forties. As we have seen, the prospects for the cultivation of sugar, which increased at a remarkable rate in the period 1836-46, were found more and more disappointing. As a consequence, when the prices of indigo looked up in 1849-50, a large part of the capital invested in sugar was transferred to indigo. It was about 1850 that 'sugar was finally superseded by indigo as the European industry of the district of Tirhoot'.<sup>59</sup> Of the 86 indigo factories found by the Revenue Surveyor in 1850, several were originally meant for sugar and afterwards converted into indigo factories. A consequence of the determined resistance of peasants to the cultivation of indigo in Bengal since 1859-60 was the withdrawal of the capital from there and its transference to Bihar—a development which immensely helped the growth of indigo cultivation there.

The Bihar indigo planters could confidently continue extending cultivation, since the market for the Bengal indigo was fairly steady. It held a practically monopoly position. Attempts at growing indigo in other parts of the world (for instance, in Central America and Java) were not as great a success as to perceptibly affect this position. The invention of the chemical dye began to tell on the Bengal indigo trade only since the mid-nineties. Once the dye established its reputation in the market, the Bengal indigo was no match for it, and the continuous decline in its cultivation in Bengal and Bihar could not be arrested.<sup>60</sup>

Despite periodical variations in the extent of poppy cultivation, the long term trend was a considerable growth.<sup>61</sup> In the 40-year period 1845-46 to 1885-86 the cultivation increased by 221%.<sup>62</sup> Since Government had the sole control over the cultivation of poppy, it was its decisions to extend or reduce cultivation which were responsible for the changes in its extent. The Government policy was to derive the maximum amount of revenue from exercising a monopoly control over the production and sale of opium. The method adopted to that end was to maintain the cultivation of poppy at such a level where a relatively high price resulting from insufficient production would not encourage the import of opium into China from other countries or the cultivation of poppy in China herself; or a large production resulting in the fall in the market prices of opium and at the same time increasing the total cost of opium manufacture would not reduce the revenue of Government. Given such a policy, wide fluctuations in the extent of poppy cultivation were inevitable. Government could control



the number of peasants who would be permitted to grow the crop for it, but it could not control the productivity of the poppy land, which entirely depended in any particular season on climatic variations. Poppy was particularly sensitive to these. Other conditions remaining the same, an abundant poppy harvest for two or three successive seasons would persuade Government to reduce the cultivation. Interpretations by Government of the precise role of the other variables—competition with other countries and the rate of growth of the indigenous cultivation in China—in the fluctuations of the market prices of opium often varied—thus affecting the decision of Government on the desirable extent of poppy cultivation in Bengal. Government at times related the upward trend of opium prices to an insufficiency of the production in Bengal, and tended to believe that unless production was raised the Bengal opium would face a keen contest with the rival varieties in the Chinese market—a development fraught with dangerous consequences for the security of the opium revenue of Government. To counteract this probable menace Government launched on a scheme of extending cultivation as rapidly as possible, only to find that its apprehension of such a menace was unfounded.

The variations in the extent of cultivation had some distinct phases. There was an enormous expansion of the cultivation in the period 1860-64. The alarm of Government over the gradual abandonment of poppy cultivation by peasants, disaffected over the low price paid them for crude opium, was heightened by the informations it received about the growth of indigenous cultivation in China. The Government of Bengal thus expressed its concern: 'The whole opium revenue is in a precarious state, when for many years, the auction price in Calcutta is artificially maintained at such an extreme point that out of India, uncongenial lands are being converted into poppy gardens'.<sup>63</sup> In this context the Government policy should be 'to extend the cultivation, the manufacture remaining still profitable, until the increasing cultivation of opium in China is decisively checked'. The increase of the cultivators' price, to provide incentive to them to extend their poppy cultivation, from Rs. 3½ to Rs. 5 within two years was unprecedented. Government was so keen on expansion that it did not object to the employment of inferior soils, generally unsuitable for poppy. The Bihar Opium Agent, who held a different view, was reprimanded. 'Certainly the ryot must know what his own land would grow better than the opium agent and as Government pays only for the quantity produced, it is the affair of the ryot, not of the Government, what sort of land opium is grown upon.'<sup>64</sup>

A reaction followed soon. In 1864 Government suddenly realised that the extension of the cultivation at the current rate would soon result in overstocking the market, which would eventually affect the opium revenues by lowering prices. The cultivators' price was reduced and the Opium Agents were instructed 'to take up no new lands, to make no engagements with any new ryots, to confine those with whom engagements were made last year strictly within the limits of their former cultivation; to



give them facilities for diverting land to other purposes . . . and on no account to allow the ryots to cultivate in excess of the area for which they may engage'.<sup>65</sup> This restrictive policy did not change till 1868-69, when a shortfall in production and the disquieting news of the fast growth of poppy cultivation in China persuaded Government to revise its policy. It wanted the cultivation extended again as far as possible. In 1875 this policy of unlimited expansion was changed for the one of concentration on the best lands without reducing the aggregate production. Even the abundant harvests of 1875-76 and 1876-77 did not lead Government to take 'active' measures to contain further extension of cultivation. Government found it 'quite enough for the present to leave the reduction of the price . . . to produce its natural and legitimate effect in the reduction of the area cultivated'.<sup>66</sup> Unfavourable seasons causing an appreciable decline in production reinforced this cautious policy of not hastily reducing the cultivation. The problem now was to arrest the decline by active measures for promoting cultivation, and the policy was continued till 1885-86, when Government reverted to the policy of 1875—'neither advancing, nor going back'. A radical change followed in 1887-88. 'Stringent' orders were issued to the opium agents 'to give up the least remunerative tracts, to refuse advances to unsatisfactory cultivators and bad villages, and to close inferior cultivation in the neighbourhood of large towns'.<sup>67</sup> This is what distinguished 'active' measures from the passive ones for eliminating unwanted cultivation.

Jute, unlike the crops we have studied so far, was a new crop. (We do not include tea, another new crop). Its emergence as an important cash crop dated only from the mid-fifties. The growth rate of jute cultivation was strikingly rapid.<sup>68</sup> Poppy and sugar cane had a comparable record. But jute occupied a much larger area of the cultivated land than any of these crops. The estimated area of sugarcane cultivation at the end of the 19th century was 860,200 acres. The poppy cultivation seldom exceeded 9½ lacs of bighas (approximate 3·20 lacs of acres). Even in Sahabad having the largest extent of sugarcane cultivation, sugarcane occupied not more than 3% of the total cultivation in the first decade of the 20th century.<sup>69</sup> The poppy cultivation did not occupy more than 1% to 3% of the cultivated area.<sup>70</sup> This percentage in the case of indigo in the most prominent indigo districts—Saran, Muzaffarpur, Champaran and Darbhanga—was 3·54, 5·62, 6·63 and 3·08 respectively.<sup>71</sup> The average of the jute cultivation in the 10 year period 1891-92 to 1900-1901 was 2,030,548 acres.<sup>72</sup> In the districts of Rangpur, Tippera, Mymensingh and Dacca jute occupied nearly 30%, 27%, 18% and 13·5% respectively of the net cropped area in the year 1901-02.<sup>73</sup>

This enormous expansion of jute cultivation in the course of less than five decades resulted from an increasing demand for raw jute. Before the establishment of the jute factories in Bengal, the supply of Bengal jute was mostly confined to the Dundee mills. But a strong feeling at the time against the 'adulteration' of hemp and flax by combining them with jute—



a feeling best conveyed by the current commercial phrase 'warranted free from Indian jute'—retarded its wider use. An appreciable progress resulted from the decision of the Netherlands Government, about 1838, to replace flax by jute in the manufacture of coffee bags for the East Indies. But the decisive turn in the tide occurred with the Crimean war (1854-55). The war cut off the supply of flax, the main source of which was Russia. The old prejudice against jute completely disappeared, and the Bengal jute began to flow in. The establishment of jute mills in Bengal from 1855, which was made possible by the coming of the coal and railway age, further widened the market for jute. The local jute industry grew apace, particularly in the first two decades. The five mills established between 1855 and 1866 'simply coined money', as Wallace, the author of *Romance of Jute* puts it. In 1872-75 thirteen new mills were set up and the number of looms increased from 1250 in 1873 to 3500 in 1875. A depression followed and only one new mill was added in 1875-82. The *raison d'être* of this confident jute enterprise was the increasing use of gunny bags which the expanding trade of rice, cotton, wheat, etc. both in and outside India necessitated.

Incomplete statistics of the consumption of raw jute in the local mills baffle any attempt at a precise quantification of its total production. So we take exports as an *indication* of the rate of its growth. The following are the quinquennial statistics of exports in the period 1828-29 to 1872-73.<sup>74</sup>

Quinquennial period	Total exports in Cwts.
1828-29 to 1832-33	59,004
1833-34 to 1836-38	337,415
1838-39 to 1842-43	585,238
1843-44 to 1847-48	1,170,279
1848-49 to 1852-53	2,196,750
1853-54 to 1857-58	3,554,133
1858-59 to 1862-63	4,848,620
1863-64 to 1867-68	13,140,550
1868-69 to 1872-73	24,290,814

Excepting the years 1866-68 the period was one of unbroken prosperity. A major setback occurred after the year 1872-73. Prices fell and peasants could not sell a large part of their produce. The depression was, however, shortlived. The confidence in the stability of the jute trade was shown by the eagerness of investors to purchase the shares of the new companies floated during the slump. 'The shares of the jute companies. . . are selling at premia considerably in advance of former quotations. Indeed, the trade has laid so deep a hold on the public confidence that, in the case of the Seebpore Jute Company, just formed (1873), double the number of shares to be allotted were subscribed for in less than a week after the scheme was set afloat.'<sup>75</sup> A distinct trend after 1873 was a decline in the export of raw jute. The export decline from 7,061,951 Cwts in 1872-73 to 4,532,148 Cwts in 1876-77.<sup>76</sup> The Collector of Sea Customs, Calcutta



related it to the increased consumption in the local mills. The explanation is hardly convincing, since the stationary state of jute cultivation is to be accounted for. It was an indication that the price received by the cultivators continued to be low, since the depression of 1872-73. The decision of peasants to gradually substitute rice for jute was reinforced by the rising prices of rice from the beginning of the Bengal famine in 1873-74 to the end of the famines in Madras and Bombay in 1877-78. Falling prices, with the disappearance of the famine conditions, persuaded peasants to take to jute again. A larger demand in U.K. and other importing countries and a more favourable rate of exchange contributed to the revival of the jute trade.<sup>77</sup>

The growth of commercial agriculture had a deep impact on the peasant economy and the peasant community. To understand the nature of the impact it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that though the long-term trend in our period was an expansion of the size of the cash crop cultivation, yet it formed, as we have seen, a small part of the total cultivation. Even jute, the most extensively cultivated cash crop, did not occupy more than 10% of the total crop area of the districts in which it was grown, though in some particular districts the area was much larger. To analyse this impact we shall mainly concentrate on two questions: (1) to what extent could commercial agriculture affect the existing production organisation? (2) how did it affect the production efforts of peasants? Did it stimulate or depress them? We shall particularly emphasise the new circumstances which bore on the questions in our period.

The traditional form of the production organisation can be described as small peasant farming, where peasants themselves owned the means of production. Most peasants had land, whatever the legal or customary nature of its title, though it did not always suffice for their subsistence. The family labour supplemented at times by the co-operative communal labour and by a small quantity of paid labour was the usual size of the labour force employed in the cultivation of individual peasant's holdings. His small surplus, ploughs and cattle, and loans from the village moneylenders and graindealers constituted the necessary capital of a peasant. These loans did not necessarily involve any interference on the part of moneylenders in this choice of crops.

The only two crops whose cultivation required a revision of this framework were tea and indigo. We exclude tea from our discussion, since it did not directly affect the peasant community. Its production organisation was capitalistic, but this did not necessitate expropriation of peasant producers in the regions covered by the tea cultivation. Tea was cultivated in waste lands purchased or leased from Government in large blocks, containing only tiny patches of settled agriculture. Indirectly, however, tea had a wholesome effect on the agriculture of the districts in which it was grown and also of the neighbouring districts. The presence of a large number of tea labourers created a steady effective demand for a considerable quantity of rice and thereby stimulated the production of rice,



gradual substitution by planters of *zerat* cultivation for *ryoti*, and this process resulted in considerably modifying the existing small peasant farming. Each of these forms of cultivation involved a distinctive labour process. Under the latter the holding of a small peasant was the unit of cultivation; except a little circulating capital in the form of advances from planters the peasant had to provide all the necessary means of production. The cultivation was under a written contract; the entire risk of cultivation was the peasant's, and he had to surrender the entire produce at a fixed price. The *zerat* cultivation was done on the planter's own land and wholly financed by him and the risk of cultivation was his. Whenever the small peasant was brought to the scene it was in the form of wage labourer.

The impact of the latter system on the peasant economy derived from the way it originated and was organised. The real meaning of *zerat* was the private land of the landlord. To this original land the landlord could lawfully add in different ways; for instance, by taking over lands of absconding peasants or of peasants dying without heirs. But the *zerat* system associated with indigo planting was not at all such an innocent process. The Commissioner of Patna thus describes its origin: 'under the *zerat* system the planter takes a terminable lease of proprietary rights, whether with or without specific private lands, and employs the powers hired from the zamindars for the purpose of confiscating ryots' tenures and converting them into *zerat* lands'.<sup>78</sup>

The *zerat* cultivation had been steadily replacing the *ryoti* cultivation in our period.<sup>79</sup> In Muzaffarpur the *zerat* system occupied 43,202 *beegahs* of the total indigo cultivation amounting to 74,719 *beegahs*. In 1876-77, nearly 75% of the total cultivation in Darbhanga was *zerat*. A survey in three *thanas* of the Samastipur subdivision of Darbhanga in the last decade of the 19th century showed that as high as 94% of the indigo cultivation was *zerat*.<sup>80</sup> In Saran the Collector found that the enormous increase in indigo cultivation from 22,000 *beegahs* in 1860 to 65,000 in 1877-78 was mostly under this system.

The conversion of the *ryoti* cultivation into *zerat*, an established process prior to our period, was practised on an increasingly wider scale after the revolt of the indigo peasants in Champaran and Darbhanga in 1867-68. The planters found it the most effective means at the time to keep the indigo system functioning more efficiently than before. Their calculations were shrewd enough: if peasants in possession of their lands were found troublesome, the proper remedy would be to dispossess them of their lands, and to make them work for planters as mere labourers. Planters could thereby avoid having to depend on the peasants for the use of their land and labour. They were confident of success in this daring course entirely because of their safe reliance on the exercise of the coercive authority of zamindars in their capacity as either proprietors or farmers.

Though the *zerat* system involving the expropriation of peasant producers looked like capitalistic farming, in content it was not, since the distinctive wage-labour system was absent. Planters did not recruit



their labour from the open market. It was the destitute peasants themselves, forcibly dispossessed of their land by planters, who provided the necessary labour force. But even this labour was not paid at the current market rate. Macdonnell, Collector of Darbhanga, characterised the *zerat* system as one of 'compulsory labour'. He found the peasant 'compelled by the planter, who to possess this leverage of compulsion is his *ticcadar* (farmer), to give his labour at wages which do not vary with the times and are always low.'<sup>81</sup> In fact the *zerat* cultivation was a perpetuation of the *ryoti* cultivation—a forced cultivation upheld by planter's authority as a *ticcadar*—,with its contradictions deriving from the existing production organisation resolved in a particular way. Though indigo cultivation did not develop, unlike tea cultivation, the characteristics of a capitalistic farming, yet the *zerat* system involving dispossession of peasants from their lands and the use of peasant labour by extra-economic coercion amounted to a negation of the traditional peasant farming.

Despite the retention of small peasant farming as the foundation of the cultivation of commercial crops, the production organisation had developed new features, the most important ones being the emergence of a new group of credit financiers and the exercise by them of a new kind of control over the cultivation process and the disposal of the produce. The cultivation of most of these crops was not initially financed by peasants' resources, and a system of advances constituted its foundation. But in very many cases it was not the traditional moneylenders who made these advances. A new credit agency emerged. Even in the case of rice cultivation itself, the usual preserve of local moneylenders, the new credit agency became active, particularly at a time when the rice market tended to expand. In respect of the Bihar districts at least, Macdonnell, Collector of Darbhanga, could confidently write: 'In point of fact, a large portion of the crop—the rice crop particularly—is hypothecated from year to year; advances are made on it, and it is exported as soon as reaped'.<sup>82</sup> Such a hypothecation *against advances* was not a characteristic form of the traditional rural credit system, as we shall see presently. Government itself made the advances for poppy, and the indigo planters for indigo. As for sugarcane, official reports, the most valuable sources of information on the question, are not precise as to how its cultivation was financed. The Government of Bengal believed: 'The cultivation of sugarcane, though expensive, is lucrative. It is confined to the well-to-do ryots, and the aid of moneylenders is seldom sought'.<sup>83</sup> This applied to those cases only where the crop was consumed locally or by peasants' families. But when the crop was intended for the market and the scale of cultivation widened peasants could not do without borrowing. Reports of the local officers contradict the statement of the Government of Bengal. The Commissioner of Burdwan writes: 'When crushing out the juice and converting the same into *gur* (raw sugar), most of them generally take advances from the moneylenders to enable them to manufacture or dispose of their *gur* on the spot, or in the nearest market'.<sup>84</sup> In Rajshahi 'some cultivators



take advances from mahajuns at the commencement of the season, in which case they repay the debt in *gur*, giving the latter at from 6 to 8 annas per maund under the market rate.<sup>55</sup> In Pabna 'manufacturers generally work on borrowed capital or are co-sharers with the mahajuns, who advance money on condition of getting interest as well as of getting coarse sugar at a price below the market rate'.<sup>56</sup>

In fact a rise in the demand and the market price of sugar attracted even peasants of common means who did not mind borrowing if the cultivation brought them a larger income. As to the source of credit the official reports did not carefully distinguish between the local moneylenders and the traders in *gur*. The reports we have quoted unmistakably show that a group of traders clearly distinguishable from local moneylenders was active, and, as a consequence, the system of hypothecation against advances was coming into greater use. In some districts (like Bareilly) of N.W.P., specialising in the production of sugar, such a system was almost universal. In the Beheea estate of Sahabad, one of the biggest centres of sugarcane production in Bihar, the European owners of the estate themselves actively engaged in sugar trade, had the leading role in making such advances.

It is difficult to quantify the extent of the dependence of jute peasants on the alien credit groups for financing their cultivation. An official enquiry in 1873 arrived at the conclusion: 'There is no demand for advances, and a good number of ryots in easy circumstances carry on the cultivation without taking any advances from mahajuns or dealers. But in some places the system of advances is in vogue'.<sup>57</sup> Another official enquiry revealed that this system did not become universal even as late as 1934. The system was not universal, but the official report of 1873 was not right in underestimating its role. Surprisingly, the report itself contains much evidences which sufficiently refutes its conclusion, and the report itself qualifies it. Of the important jute districts it was only Dacca where peasants were found to be growing jute without advances. The system widely prevailed in Rangpur, Mymensingh and some other districts. Normally a continuous expansion of jute manufacture resulted in a wider prevalence of this system, since in a market thronged by a host of purchasers, this would guarantee more than a system of ready money purchase a secure supply of an increasing quantity of raw jute.<sup>58</sup> The conditions of making the advances varied from place to place. Agreements were in very many cases not verbal. A written contract stated all the conditions. Sometimes the whole crop, sometimes a part, was hypothecated to the creditors. The price at which peasants sold their crop was invariably below the market rate. In Mymensingh they had to give their creditors 5 seers on every maund of jute sold to cover the charge for interest on the advances.

The agencies making the necessary advances were mostly people connected with the jute trade or jute manufacturing organisations. With the coming of a jute slump, these agencies disappeared.



The advances given by the new credit agency basically differed from the loans provided by local moneylenders. The latter advanced loans to peasants in grain or money with the ulterior motive of getting them back on a high rate of interest, without intending to control the production process. These advances ultimately partook of the nature of usury. The new credit agency, connected with trade or manufacturing organisations was primarily interested in the secure supply of a certain portion of peasants' produce, the failure in which would inflict on it a greater loss than the wastage of advances immediately involved.

The emergence of this new credit group, connected with new trade or manufacture, but without any previous connection with the existing rural credit system, was not, however, incompatible with the persistence or even consolidation of the old credit agency. The two crops whose cultivation entirely depended on the new credit groups were indigo and poppy. The indigo planters systematically sought to supplant this agency and partly succeeded in this. The cultivation of poppy, on the other hand, resulted in strengthening it. The *khatadars* on whose assistance Government primarily relied to plan poppy production were none but the village moneylenders. Kemble, Behar Opium Agent, called *khatadar* a 'village banker.'<sup>99</sup> They were the peasants' representatives, taking and distributing the poppy advances and being responsible for payment to individual peasants for their crude opium. The association with the poppy system provided the *khatadars* with means for strengthening their hold over the peasants. Government had no direct contact with individual peasants. It did not interfere with the way the *Khatadars* persuaded or forced peasants to grow poppy. The poppy advances enabled them to more effectively discharge one of their normal functions as moneylenders. The entire amount of the poppy advances was straight away paid to zamindars as rent due from the community of the poppy growers. The system of payment was another instrument of control. As the Opium Commission of 1883 wrote, 'The members of a *Khata* are in fact, though not altogether willingly, members of a joint stock company, of unlimited liability.'<sup>100</sup> Peasants having a full crop had to share in the losses of their brethren from failure of crops, and the system of apportionment of losses resulted at times in a perpetual indebtedness of some peasants to the *khatadars*. The increasing rigour in the Government policy regarding remission of balances arising out of the failure of poppy crop drove peasants deeper into the moneylenders' net. In 1879-80 the liberal policy of partially remitting such losses was abandoned. The Government of Eden thus formulated the new policy: Government 'cannot unreservedly accept the position that when the season is a good one, the cultivators are to gain, and when it is a bad one the Government is to lose.'<sup>101</sup> The Opium Commission of 1883 condemned such a role of Government 'as a hard task master'. But the Board of Revenue justified it: 'The system, under which the cultivator looked to Government to cherish and protect him, must give place to a more business-like and practical system, under which the ryot would



feel that he has entered into an agreement which entails some responsibility on him for fulfilment.<sup>92</sup> Under an altered economic set-up, it would be wrong, according to the Board, to follow a different principle. The Board thus argued its case: In earlier years poppy was a highly attractive crop and a peasant took pride in his 'status as a Government cultivator'. Government also assumed that without an unusually inclement season, peasants would not wilfully violate their agreements with Government, and this belief in the integrity of peasants made it lenient to them. But poppy had lost this enviable position to other more remunerative crops. The Board emphasised two implications of this economic change. First, peasants had now better means, in case they cultivated both poppy and other crops, to pay off their balances. Secondly, prospects of a bigger profit from other crops would tempt them to violate the agreement on the basis of which they accepted advances from Government. A lenient law would tempt a peasant 'to neglect the interest of the Government in favour of those of the harder task master to whom he is under bond as to his potatoes or wheat crops.'

The cultivation of jute shows the complex nature of the interaction of the new credit agency and the old. In the period of a rapid expansion of jute cultivation, the former had undoubtedly encroached on the latter's preserve. But apart from the fact that the advances given by the new credit group could cover only a segment of the fast growing cultivation of jute, the setting in of a slump in the jute trade reduced the scale of activities of this group to an extent far disproportionate to the fall in the market demand, this being due to the highly speculative nature of jute trade. The old credit agency could then soon recover its lost ground. The expansion of jute cultivation tended at times to strengthen it, particularly when this expansion taking place at the cost of rice cultivation and thereby reducing the local grain supply made unavoidable the dependence of peasants on moneylenders for this supply.

When peasants decided to extend cultivation without advances from the new credit group on condition of hypothecating their crop, a dependence on the local moneylenders was in most cases unavoidable. I have so far come across no evidence to support Myint's statement: 'The essential lubricant which pushed the peasants so smoothly and rapidly into export production and the money economy was the existence of a considerable margin of surplus productive capacity in the form of both surplus labour and surplus land over and above the minimum subsistence requirements'.<sup>93</sup>

We now turn to the second new feature on which the existing organisation of small peasant farming developed under the impact of the growth of cash crops—control over the production process and the disposal of crops. This varied from crop to crop. The credit agency exercised control over the production process only in the case of poppy and indigo. The poppy peasants could not produce as much as they liked, and the usual device of Government to reduce cultivation to a safe point was to reduce



the cultivators' price, so that many a marginal farmer was weeded out. As regards contraction or abandonment of poppy cultivation by peasants themselves there was no legal bar, but a large number of extra-legal circumstances made it difficult, at times impossible for them. The control was at its worst in the case of indigo cultivation. It often degenerated into a harassing interference in all phases of agricultural operations, and invariably affected the cultivation of rice too. Such an interference was the necessary consequence of indigo planters' methods for enforcing an unremunerative cultivation.

The system of advances necessitated a control over the disposal of peasants' crop too. Both the poppy and indigo peasants had to surrender their produce at a fixed price, whatever the existing market rate, and the principles behind the price fixation were often arbitrary in that they virtually ignored the cost of production and the probable market price of these commodities. The rice, jute and sugarcane growers too had to enter into agreements, supported by legally enforceable contracts to hand over to their creditors a certain portion of the produce at a fixed price. But their case differed from that of the poppy and indigo peasants. The latter had to surrender their entire produce, while the former parted with only a part. Moreover, the price fixation in the former case was much less arbitrary and more likely to be influenced by market forces. Government could afford to ignore market considerations to a certain extent because the legal prohibition of poppy cultivation for any group or groups other than Government eliminated all competition in the market. The indigo planters could enforce their arbitrary prices by using the coercive authority of zamindars or farmers.

How did production for the market affect the production efforts of peasants? In some countries the peasant community had been hard hit by frequent, at times violent fluctuations in the market, the injury having been greater in the economies specialising in the production of one or two crops. The fact that the supply of agricultural commodities as a whole has in the short run a one-way flexibility in the sense that higher prices induce an expansion and that lower prices do not bring about a comparable contraction partly accounts for this injury. To what extent did the peasant economy of Bengal suffer this injury? The poppy and jute growers were the worst sufferers. The poppy peasants were particularly hit by the sudden decision of Government to reduce cultivation. Paradoxically, such a decision usually followed, particularly in our period, as we have seen before, a bountiful harvest which faced Government with the menace of overproduction. The widest range of fluctuations occurred in the jute market, and the jute peasants suffered worse than the poppy growers. Government was bound to purchase whatever quantity of opium was produced in any particular season. But where jute peasants did not grow under a system of advances, a slump in the jute price inflicted on them a serious economic loss, particularly because the slump invariably followed a rapid extension of jute cultivation under the stimulus of rising



prices. We can take, for instance, the consequences of the depression of 1873. An official enquiry in the year revealed that in both Dacca and Mymensingh, two major jute districts, 'everywhere. . . quantities of the jute grown last season had been left abandoned on the fields. The falling market in Calcutta seems to have created a panic amongst the cultivators, so much so that in some instances, even jute which had been cut and put in the water to steep, was abandoned entirely.'<sup>4</sup> The Collector of Dacca forecast a decline by nearly 67% in the cultivation of jute in the following year. In many parts of the 24-Parganas like Barasat and Baridpur, and in Hugli, the unsold quantity of jute was estimated at one-fourth to three-fourths of the total production. Such fluctuations were a normal feature of jute cultivation, though the range varied from time to time.

But despite these occasional jerks an expansion of the market and the presence of facilities for the movement of commodities to the market introduced a healthy strain into the economy of some regions. Jute illustrates this. It minimised the hazards of dependence on rice as the sole money crop, and whenever the price of rice tended to fall (as for instance, after the end of the famine in Bombay and Madras in 1877-78 and again in 1883-84 after an unusually abundant harvest), jute provided a way out. The extension of jute cultivation, largely at the cost of rice, is evidence that the rice market was not extensive enough to absorb a continuously expanding supply of rice.

The relations of production had a more important role than changes in the market in affecting the production efforts of peasants, particularly in the case of indigo and poppy. The unwholesome effects of indigo on the peasant economy followed from the enforcement of an unremunerative cultivation, necessitating forcible employment of the means of production of peasants and their eventual ejection from land. The peasants' reaction to it was a sullen resentment, which occasionally exploded into a violent resistance. Poppy played a positive role in the peasant economy by providing advances to peasants without interest at time when they needed them most, that is, when their rent instalments became due. But some other conditions under which poppy growers had to work tended to far outweigh this advantage. There was no certainty as to how much land the Opium Department would like them to cultivate. The law prohibited them from reaching the open market, and the price paid them by Government was admittedly low. The particular nature of relations between *khatadars* and zamindars on the one hand and the peasants on the other, to control which Government failed to take any effective measure, resulted in further reducing the small profits from poppy. Illegal exactions by *khatadars* on various accounts were a common grievance of poppy growers. The system of payment by which the losses from the failure of crops of some peasants were distributed amongst all resulted in discouraging efficient farming. Government rejected suggestions for introducing the system of individual payment to peasants on the ground that it thereby risked



'the opposition of the whole body of *khattadars* and a possible collapse of the cultivation in Bihar.'<sup>93</sup> In 1884-85 Government discussed the feasibility of a measure to prevent landlords from exacting a higher differential rent on poppy lands and concluded that such an interference would be improper. The Board of Revenue thus argued the case of non-interference: Support by Government officers of the resistance of peasants to the enhancement of rent on poppy lands in one estate would encourage a similar resistance everywhere. Commitment made once to support the peasants would thus tend to be perpetual. So it would be wise to avoid being involved at all. Moreover, from the point of view of the security of poppy cultivation in Bihar, it would be a folly to antagonise the landlords. 'Engaged as the Government is in Behar in a large commercial enterprise, success in which is to a great extent dependent on the attitude adopted towards it by the local landlords, it would be exceedingly unwise to take an active part as supporters of peasants'.<sup>94</sup> Some opium agents, however, disagreed with such a judgement.

All these made peasants increasingly apathetic to poppy, and with new opportunities for the production of more remunerative crops they were gradually changing over to them. Of these opportunities opium agents particularly emphasised the improvement in communications. These, as the Bihar Opium Agent found, 'have opened out for the cultivators markets for their country produce which they did not produce before, whilst European and native competition following on the lines of communication may be said to have in some instances brought the market on to the very fields in which the crops are grown'<sup>95</sup>. An official enquiry in 1869<sup>96</sup> showed how best lands were being diverted from poppy to other crops. The retention of some of these lands still for poppy was not due to any particular fondness for poppy but because "no one knows better than the ryots themselves that it does not pay them to cultivate the poppy except in a good soil".<sup>97</sup> Government had to admit that at the existing price, the poppy cultivation could not be further extended. A special enquiry in 1880 by Buckland, a member of the Board of Revenue, convinced him that 'not only that there is no hope of increase, but that the tide has turned considerably against us. The evidence against any chance of an increase under the existing circumstances, and at the present price of opium seems to be indisputable'.<sup>100</sup>

The cultivation of other crops was free from the kind of control exercised over indigo and poppy growers. Peasants' gains from them, however, depended on the extent of hypothecation of their crops to their creditors, presumably at a price lower than the market rate. The system of hypothecation was undoubtedly gaining a firmer hold. But as we have seen earlier, this was affected by the trend of rising prices in the market. Contemporaries particularly stressed the fondness of peasants for jute—a view confirmed by the enormous expansion and the large size of jute cultivation in our period. Many circumstances account for this. The offer of jute advances at a time when long after the last rice harvest



peasants were almost at the end of their resources was attractive. The substitutability of jute for the low-priced early rice was at times a more important reason. In highly fertile lands peasants could raise another crop in addition to jute in the same season—which constituted a big gain for them. Moreover, in eastern and northern districts the paddy crop was often damaged or destroyed by floods, which generally occurred after the harvesting of jute. So in the event of the loss of the rice crop, peasants could depend on jute for their subsistence.

#### CHANGING AGRARIAN RELATIONS : THE RELATIONS OF PEASANTS WITH MONEY-LENDERS AND ZAMINDARS

The growth of commercial agriculture vitally affected the peasant economy and the peasant community, but its role should not be exaggerated. Cash crops occupied a small portion of the total cultivation. Cash crop cultivation was in very many cases a mere variant of an essentially subsistence farming. No new pattern of agrarian relationship emerged. Indigo planters had to convert themselves into zamindars for success in their enterprise. The Government Opium Department had to accept the institutional framework of the zamindar-ryot relationship.

The peasant community as a whole was much more affected by its relations with moneylenders and zamindars. These relations, upheld by customs and laws, constituted the context in which the farm unit operated, and the appropriation and disposal of the various factors of production were regulated by these customs and laws. The relations between peasants and moneylenders and those between peasants and zamindars had different origins. The sole proprietary right of zamindars in land—an institution created or sanctioned and eventually consolidated by a well-defined body of laws—governed their relations with peasants. In pursuing their profession moneylenders could not count on any such pre-established legal right. The law did not compel peasants to borrow from moneylenders, let alone from any fixed group of moneylenders. But the law did compel peasants to part with a portion of their surplus in the form of rent. If peasants borrowed from moneylenders, the law did not prevent them from subsequently becoming independent of them if their resources permitted it. Thus the right of zamindars to appropriate a part of the peasants' surplus derived from a pre-established monopoly over land, and that of moneylenders form a certain role in the organisation of production.

Moneylenders in Bengal were not a sharply differentiated group. In very many cases rich peasants themselves lent money. But the role of moneylenders as a distinct group became increasingly important with time. The basic functions of the rich peasants themselves tended to assimilate to those of moneylenders with the enlargement of the scale of their loan operations. The emergence of a new credit group in connection with the



cultivation of cash crops, including in some cases rice too, has been mentioned before.

Contemporary reports <sup>101</sup> testify to the wide prevalence of indebtedness among the peasantry, but it is difficult to quantify the phenomenon and any change in it in our period. It appears that peasants, excepting a small section, were becoming more and more indebted. This is attributable to the renewed drive of zamindars to enhance ryots' rent (a phenomenon discussed later in this section), a general rise in commodity prices, in the cost of living and the cost of cultivation, the increasing extent of cash crop cultivation (the relevance of which to the question of peasants' indebtedness has been discussed earlier), and the greater frequency in the occurrence of famines.

We can identify two main changes in the general relations of moneylenders with peasants. First, a clearer definition of peasants' rights in land by the new legal concept of occupancy right (enunciated first by the Act X of 1859 and clarified later by other enactments, including the Tenancy Act VIII of 1885) and the Civil Procedure Code of 1859 gave moneylenders a better security for the realisation of their loans and, consequently, enabled peasants to borrow with greater ease. The concept of occupancy right (according to which a continuous possession of land by peasants for twelve years would give them special protection against enhancement of their rent and eviction from their holdings) was not intended by the legislators of 1859 as a conscious innovation, but simply as a means of simplifying an existing system. The arbitrary choice of the twelve year period was believed by them to have been quite in conformity with accepted usages. But as a legal concept it was new. Though, it did not succeed in replacing the local customs in many parts of Bengal and could not thus constitute the basis of a new agrarian relation, yet it considerably affected the relations of moneylenders with peasants. Customs were well understood, but moneylenders could more safely rely in their loan transactions on a precise legal definition of peasants' rights in land. Secondly, a further legal measure (revised Civil Procedure Code, Act X of 1877, Section 266) prohibiting in execution of decrees the attachment of the 'implements of husbandry' and the 'materials of an agriculturist's house or farm-building' made peasants' land a far greater security for the realisation of loans by moneylenders, thus facilitating the alienation of peasants' holdings to them. In both these cases the pre-established English law of contract helped moneylenders consolidate their position. The law of contract, however, as the Collector of Hugli points out, was seldom fully applied. 'Our law enables him (the moneylender) to recover strictly what is written (in the bond), but even to this day, to my own knowledge, in many parts of the country *mahajuns* do not dream of insisting on the letter of the bond'.<sup>102</sup> A local *panchayat* often intervened and gave an award after carefully considering the material circumstances of the indebted peasants. 'Such an award', the Collector of Hugli observes, 'in my experience, gives the *mahajun* only



a very moderate interest'. The Collector explained this forbearance on the part of *mahajans* by their reluctance to incur the opprobrium of society to which their defiance of the *panchayat* decisions would expose them.

It is useful in this connection to examine the validity of the persistent assertion by zamindars that moneylenders had been buying up the holdings of peasants, thus inflicting on the peasant producers a far greater injury than any other class. Such a view widely prevailed also in the official circle. The official enquiry of 1893-94<sup>103</sup> established two points. First, the number of peasant holdings alienated was fast increasing. Secondly, professional moneylenders formed only a small minority of the purchasers of the holdings. Analysing the statistics of 1883-84 the Bengal Board of Revenue concluded that about 17% of the purchasers were moneylenders. Again, 'Of these so-called *mahajuns* but a small proportion were probably other than substantial ryots themselves, for these are the chief moneylenders in rural Bengal'.<sup>104</sup> This observation particularly applied to the districts of Bengal proper. Of the purchasers of peasant holdings in Noakhali in the years 1890-93 only 5.3% were moneylenders. The situation in the Division of Rajshahi was thus summed up by its Commissioner: 'The holdings were seldom bought and more infrequently retained by professional moneylenders'. In Bakarganj 'there is very little tendency to accumulation of property in the hands of this class (the moneylenders). The bulk of the bonafide purchasers figure under the heads of intermediate tenureholders and ryots'. In Khulna 'the number of holdings that have passed into the hands of moneylenders is smaller than that which has passed into those of zamindars who frequently secure a ryoti holding in order to annoy another zamindar'. Most of the district officers were unanimous on the relative unimportance of a distinct group of professional moneylenders in rural Bengal. Westmacott, Collector of Noakhali, found that 'the capital used for agriculture in Bengal is in the hands of thrifty saving ryots and that they lend it to their unthrifty neighbours and to those who are still struggling into the position of a cultivator'.<sup>105</sup> The Commissioner of Burdwan thus states his experience: 'In many parts of Bengal, especially of this division, it is difficult to draw a distinction between a moneylender and an ordinary ryot. Any ryot who saves a little money—and there are many who do so—lends it in small sums to his neighbours so that almost every well-to-do ryot is a moneylender'. The Collector of the district of Burdwan drew on his experiences in districts other than Burdwan: 'In the districts with which I am familiar, a rustic moneylender is generally a successful cultivator, and a cultivator if he is successful and saves a little money, becomes almost as a matter of course a moneylender'. Cotton, Commissioner of Chittagong, thus writes of his Division: 'What is meant by a *mahajun*? Is it not the case that in many, if not the most, cases the *mahajun* is also a person directly interested in agriculture?..... As soon as a ryot gets free from debt, his head is above water, does he not immediately set up as a moneylender on his own account?'<sup>106</sup>



Whoever the alienee, a professional moneylender or a substantial ryot, the fate of the peasant who lost his land did not much differ. In most cases he continued to cultivate his land, on condition of giving the alienee half of the produce (*adhiyari*). This arrangement was seldom violated by the latter, but the peasant had no protection under the law if any such violation occurred. Nowhere did the alienees attempt a reorganisation of cultivation, which the enlargement of the farm unit as a consequence of several purchases made possible. The only difference that the alienation brought was a new right of the alienee to a larger share in the produce of his undertenants.

Most contemporary opinions on moneylenders tended to identify the institution of moneylending with that of usury, and moneylenders with a set of unscrupulous and greedy men, largely responsible for the destitution of most peasants. Such a description is a half-truth. Given the perpetual hazards of cultivation based on low techniques, the various economic needs of the peasantry and the paucity of credit facilities from any other source, the positive role of moneylenders in the continuous functioning of the peasant economy is undeniable. District officers, who intimately knew rural Bengal, were convinced that the elimination of this group would under the circumstances have been utterly disastrous for peasants.

The impact of the institution of zamindary and the relations of zamindars with peasants on the agrarian society did not derive from any such indispensable role. This impact derives from the landed property right of zamindars and the right to appropriate a variable share in peasants' produce on the one hand, and the superior social position of zamindars by virtue of their possession of landed property. This relationship involved fundamental questions affecting the peasant economy—the degree of security of peasants in the holding of land, the extent of the liability to pay enhanced rent, the size of the enhanced rent, the nature of the penal measures adopted by zamindars in regard to defaulting peasants and various other related things.

It is in the period under review that zamindars consistently formulated what may be called the doctrine of high landlordism, though some of the beliefs and assumptions that went into its making existed earlier. The statement of the doctrine was a kind of response to the challenge to their position which the zamindars believed the proposed rent law (1880-85) amounted to. The doctrine can be thus summed up: it entirely disagreed with the prevalent assumption among the pro-ryot enthusiasts in the official circle that zamindars and ryots were co-proprietors in land—an assumption which constituted the main defence of the legal change contemplated by Government for safeguarding peasants' rights. Whatever rights the ryots had been enjoying, zamindars argued, did not derive from any a priori principle, but were entirely conditional upon certain specific historical circumstances. Such circumstances, however, zamindars believed, had considerably been changed by the Permanent Settlement of 1793. Purchasers of estates at the public auction since the settlement had



looked upon such purchases as the most profitable mode of investment of their liquid cash, and assumed that such purchases gave them a complete freedom in the management of their estates, a necessary corollary of which was the right to substitute contracts for customs and to enhance rent of ryots on the basis of these contracts. Any legislation which ignored this historical change and put constraints on the growth of the contractual relations, zamindars concluded, would be an improper step. Zamindars sometimes vaguely talked of the undesirability of legislative interference with the natural course of economic development, but nowhere do we find any clear statement of the concept. They seemed to have believed that an artificial and indiscriminate protection of all peasants would often result in encouraging inefficient farming and a free choice of zamindars to select their tenants would largely eliminate these farmings, much to the benefit of the general peasant community.

But the practice of zamindars did not correspond to the doctrine. Given historical circumstances in fact determined the mode in which it could be put into practice. Zamindars did not participate in the production process, and this in itself constituted a limit. Contrary to current beliefs zamindars were not eager to add to the fund of demesne lands, the only exceptions being the indigo planters, and, only rarely, some indigenous zamindars of Bihar. In most cases the demesne lands were those which, for various reasons, had not yet been settled with peasant, and zamindars, particularly in Bengal, were anxious to get rid of them. They themselves explained this anxiety by the prevalent scarcity and high wages of labour, particularly in the fever-affected districts. In some places, however, the conditions on which peasants cultivated the demesne lands were different from those of the ordinary tenures of peasants. In the former case peasants' title was insecure, zamindars having reserved the right to change one peasant for another, while in the latter the title was normally secure as long as rent was regularly paid. But since peasants had to pay rent for the demesne lands in produce, and the quantity to be given to the zamindars was more or less fixed by custom, it did not serve the purpose of zamindars to frequently change cultivators.

In our period the doctrine of high landlordism mainly affected two questions: alienation of peasant holdings and enhancement of rent. Zamindars opposed with greater determination than ever before the alienation by peasants of their holdings without their prior consent. The law did not prohibit such alienations if they were necessary for the payment of rent due to zamindars. They sometimes approved of the practice even if it had nothing to do with the payment of rent, and in these cases the alienees had to pay the zamindars a certain sum as *salami* (perquisite). The growing opposition to alienations was attributable to various circumstances. The Bihar zamindars opposed the practice mainly to frustrate attempts of the indigo planters to deal directly with peasants. The loss to zamindars from such direct contacts was twofold: the resultant control of the planters over peasants would tend to diminish the authority of



zamindars in the village. Moreover, these involved a financial loss. Planters would not pay zamindars any more for permitting them to use peasants' land for indigo. Apart from other things, the most important consideration of Bengal zamindars in opposing the practice was an apprehension of the growing power of moneylenders. The contemplated move of Government for legalising these alienations strengthened this opposition. Government argued that this legalisation would considerably enhance the market value of peasant holdings, while the existing restraints deprived peasants of a fair price for them. Where peasants had to borrow, the legalisation would secure them loan on better conditions ; and where they preferred to sell their land, the higher sale price would be a distinct advantage. The resolute opposition of zamindars prevented the legislation, but it could not stop the practice of alienations.

Rent was the more fundamental question. Important changes occurred in this. Rent was in fact composed of two elements—the original rate (paid either in money or produce) and *abwabs* (illegal cesses). We discuss first the changes in regard to the latter.

In the period under review the system of *abwabs* became more consolidated. We see some exceptions in some parts of Bengal, particularly in the eastern districts, where increasing peasant resistance made zamindars more cautious in the demand and collection of the *abwabs*. In some places some of the *abwabs* were discontinued altogether. Such a consolidation partly resulted from the increasing reliance of zamindars on the *abwabs* wherever they failed to enhance peasants' rent by a normal legal process. Zamindars called this method a 'moral adjustment'. The official attitude to *abwabs* indirectly encouraged them in this. The official policy was contradictory. Government (particularly the Government of Campbell which investigated the whole question in 1872) had no doubts about the obvious illegality of the *abwabs*. By way of explaining the origin of the *abwabs* the Government of Bengal wrote to the Government of India in 1873: It is abundantly clear that during the last 30 years, the zamindars have by fraud and force confiscated and ignored very many of the rights which the ryots held from Government and under the guarantee of Government'.<sup>107</sup> But Government was reluctant to intervene mainly on three grounds. First, such an intervention would be undesirable in view of the fact that 'this system is now in universal vogue, is so deeply rooted, and so many social relations depend thereon'.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, Government was afraid that any resolute measure on the part of Government to suppress the *abwabs* would be immediately followed by a drive on the part of zamindars to enhance the rent of ryots—a development of more ominous consequences for the peasants than the perpetuation of the existing wrongs. Thirdly, Government was unwilling to face the 'social strife' that would inevitably arise from this development. Though Government believed that 'the result of that war may ultimately be to place the relations of landlords and tenants in Bengal on a sounder and more satisfactory footing. . .', yet it concluded: 'it is impossible to predicate with any certainty



so favourable an issue to a social strife which, if it became general, would be the most serious, and probably for the time, most calamitous which these provinces had known under the British rule'.<sup>109</sup> In view of the well-known pro-ryot bias of Campbell, such a retreat on the part of Government was immensely encouraging to zamindars. They fully exploited the opportunity.

There was an important change in the method of collecting the cesses. It had two forms. First, in view of the increasing bitterness of feeling between zamindars and peasants the former did not rely simply on verbal agreements with the latter for this collection. Written *pattahs* clearly stating the obligations of peasants in this respect were increasingly becoming the rule. Such an increase in the number of registered *pattahs* was a significant development in the history of agrarian relations in Bengal. Secondly, there was a move for the consolidation of the cesses with the original rate. Addition of new cesses was another change in the institution of *abwabs*. The origin of most of these—for instance, *dak khurcha* (payment made by zamindars on account of district post), income tax *khurcha* etc—was the shifting of the whole incidence of new taxes on zamindars to peasants. Thus the confirmation and consolidation of the existing cesses and the imposition of new ones, coupled with the refinement of the machinery of collecting them, must have considerably added, at least in some parts of Bengal, though not everywhere, to the quantum of appropriation of peasants' produce by zamindars.

Important changes also occurred in the institution of the legal rate of rent. We discuss first the system of produce rent, which had some distinctive features and affected peasants in a different way from money rent. Produce rent was more or less confined to the south Gangetic districts of Bihar, and here again it was most extensively prevalent in Gaya, the proportion there of lands paying produce rent to those paying money rent being 7:1. Produce rent prevailed mostly where cultivation was uncertain, and it was almost exclusively confined to rice. It was quite natural. Production was entirely financed by the small resources of cultivators, and it was they who lost most from any failure of crops. So where cultivation was uncertain, peasants would not agree to cultivate at all on condition of paying a fixed money rent. The persistence of produce rent in districts like Gaya despite the fact that large irrigation works made cultivation reasonably secure is explainable by the paramount needs of maintaining these irrigation works. Produce rent was believed to be one of the means of making zamindars fulfil their customary obligations of keeping these works in order. The failure of zamindars in this would result in the gradual decline of cultivation and eventually in the proportionate fall in their income from rent.

Adverse criticism of the system of produce rent was growing in our period. It was denounced as 'an infamous and one-sided system', and a Government officer went to the extent of calling it 'a relic of barbarism'.<sup>110</sup> Very many Bihar officers attributed the destitution of the Bihar peasantry,



which was a recurring theme in the official discussions from the late seventies onwards, partly to this system. Zamindars (and a small minority of Government officers), however, continued to defend it. The substitution of a rigid system of money rent, they argued, would be ultimately ruinous to peasants unless means were taken for making cultivation more secure than before. Moreover, while the enhancement of the rate of money rent had produced much class bitterness, civil litigation and consequent waste of money of both zamindars and peasants, produce rent, it was said, 'is a self-regulating system which adjusts itself to the variations in the price of produce, and which is best fitted to give to each of the interested parties his just rights without the intervention of laws and courts'.<sup>111</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that the system of produce rent admirably suited certain types of cultivation. But the way it worked was utterly iniquitous for peasants. Peasants provided all the means of production, but the share of the produce that was left with them was often too small for their subsistence. It seldom exceeded 35% to 37.5% of the gross produce. In the *danabandi* system (division of the crop on the basis of the estimate made by zamindar's servants), the peasant's share was sometimes still smaller because of the exaggerated estimate of the crop. The local custom according to which peasants could harvest the crop before both zamindars and ryots agreed over the mode of division of the crop was made the most of by zamindars to coerce peasants into accepting their terms. Peasants preferred foregoing a part of their share to the loss of the entire harvest which the exercise of this coercion by zamindars inflicted on them. Peasants suffered in still other ways. In many places produce rent was the normal system, since peasants paid in cash the value of the zamindar's share. The rate at which peasants were asked to pay was often arbitrary and seldom the one prevailing immediately after the harvest. Such an arbitrary selection of the rate inflated the real share of the zamindar.

It is quite natural that the prevalence of produce rent was everywhere associated with a slovenly cultivation. Such a phenomenon struck Buchanan Hamilton as early as the first decade of the 19th century. Macpherson, (who was investigating the question of the commutation of produce rent into money rent in south Sahabad), had formed a similar impression in 1884: '*Bhaoli* villages (villages paying produce rent) are almost always undercultivated when compared with others. . . . it appears to me to be very injurious to the agriculture of the country'.<sup>112</sup> Rural proverbs like *char battaya gawan oogar* (four divisions i.e. working of the system of produce rent for four years, depopulate a village) best conveyed the popular feeling on the question. A Government officer who intimately knew Bihar was 'assured by more than one Behar zamindar that when a landlord, in whose villages rents have been hitherto paid in cash, desires to harass or to oust his ryots, he has only to introduce the *battaya* system, and his object is soon effected'.<sup>113</sup>



Two major changes occurred in the system of produce rent. In the estates directly managed by Government produce rent was gradually being commuted into money rent. Peasants sometimes complained of the high rate at which this commutation was made, and wanted the previous system restored. Macpherson, however, could not reconcile these complaints with the fairly wide view that commutation had nearly everywhere brought a marked improvement in agriculture. The Tenancy Act of 1885 permitted commutation if zamindars and peasants agreed to it. But the pace of commutation in the zamindari estates was slow. Another change took place in the form of payment, particularly where the *danabundi* system prevailed. Formerly peasants had the option of either paying rent in produce or of paying the money value of the produce at a certain rate. This option tended to become increasingly rare. With the rising price of rice the payment of money value at the market rate was preferred by zamindars. Exceptions were found in those estates where the *thikadars* (farmers), with whom peasants had to directly deal, were also grain-dealers. Such a combination of the two functions was not uncommon.

Money rent had a deeper impact on the peasantry and on the general relations of zamindars with peasants. Two major changes occurred in this: (1) a new principle had emerged in regard to enhancement of rent; (2) the quantum of rent tended to be larger in most districts of Bengal, circumstances leading to it varying in different cases.

Apart from the question of the enhancement of rent and of the desirable limits to it, Government had long been investigating the foundation of the existing rent-rates with a belief that a set of economic criteria could be found which would provide the basis of a reconstruction of the rent rates. The whole approach of the Rent Commission (1880) was affected by this belief, the emphasis of the Commission being on the adjustment of the rent rates to the classes of soil. In proposing an enquiry into the rent rates in 1882, the Government of India assumed the possibility of such an adjustment. The results of the enquiry, however, contradicted such an assumption. The following are the observations of the Bengal Board of Revenue on the findings of Finucane's enquiry in Bihar: 'The rates of rent actually paid on different lands are altogether independent of the productive powers, situation, or other advantages and disadvantages of the lands respectively as compared with one another. They are equally independent of the value of the produce. Rent paid for each field often depends on historical considerations, as connected with the holder of it. . . . Differences between the rates of rent now being paid for lands of similarity and advantages depend on the differences between the old rents which were influenced by many different causes, such as—(1) favour allowed to the higher castes; (2) the different arrangements made by the planter-farmers, during the period of their leases, with individual ryots in connection with the cultivation of indigo by them, or with the exchange of lands for the purpose of indigo cultivation; (3) the higgling of the market in a country where the pressure of population and the demand for



land is great ; (4) the personal characteristics of the ryot, his strength or weakness in resisting a demand for higher rents ; (5) success and liberality in bringing the amlah of the zemindars when they made the original assessment'.<sup>114</sup> Though purely economic circumstances like the quality of lands, their nearness to the lines of communication and trade centres and routes, nature and value of the produces, the degree of the intensity of pressure of population on land and the resultant changes in the demand for land had much to do with the origin of particular rent rates and subsequent variations in them, their role was considerably affected by a number of non-economic circumstances. Such a role was in many cases obscured beyond recognition.

The new principle in regard to enhancement of rent consisted in the recognition (by the Rent Act X of 1859) of an increase in the value of produce as a valid ground for enhancement of rent. The existing law that directly related to the question of enhancement of the rate of rent was based on the concept of what was known as the *parganah nirkh* (prevailing rate of rent). Such a rate was believed to have been existing, though in fact it did not. Zamindars were permitted by law to enhance rent in their estates if it was below the *parganah nirkh*. The new principle, however, was intended by Government merely as a guide to Government officers handling rent suits and not as an absolute determinant of rent. The original draft Rent Bill did not in fact contemplate any such change. Such an omission was not inconsistent with the main plan of the Bill, which attempted merely a codification of the existing rent laws, with a view to giving them a clearer shape, and not any change in the substantive law. This accounts for the retention of the old and archaic concept of the *parganah nirkh*.

The new principle was not arbitrarily selected. It embodied a real economic change—tendency of some commodity prices to rise. The first spectacular rise in prices was caused by the Mutiny, and the rent legislators could not ignore this exceptional phenomenon. The following is a study of the movement of prices of rice in Bengal in the period 1861-1885.<sup>115</sup>

Average price of rice (number of *seers* for a rupee) for six 4-year periods.

1861-64	1865-68	1869-72	1873-76	1877-80	1881-84	1885
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
26.29	18.66	22.87	18.9	16.05	21.61	15.18

The rise in prices of rice was particularly rapid in the period 1874-1887 because of the occurrence of famines (1874, 1877-1879) and of three years of very bad crops from drought and floods (1883-85).

Indigo planters were the first to systematically use this principle. When the rebellion of the indigo peasants faced the planters with the danger of an imminent destruction of the whole indigo industry, they



decided to use a quick enhancement of rent by the application of this principle as a coercive instrument. Peasants were asked to choose between the continuation of indigo cultivation and the liability to pay a considerably enhanced rent. The legality of enhancement on the ground of a rise in the value of produce was not questioned, but the undecided point was the extent of legitimate enhancement. The High Court judgment in the case *Hills Vs Issur Ghose* (Hills was a planter of Nadia) of 1862 accepted the Malthusian definition of rent as the basis of decision, according to which rent was 'that portion of the value of the whole produce which remains to the owner of the land after all the outgoings belonging to its cultivation of whatever kind have been paid, including the profits of the capital employed, estimated according to the usual and ordinary rate of agricultural capital at the time being'. Such a definition wrote off the customary rights of peasants in regard to their rent. With this potent weapon indigo planters struck the rebel peasants. Such an interpretation of the law of 1859 was soon challenged, critics having particularly emphasised the incompatibility of the doctrine of 1862 with the organisation of the peasant economy in Bengal. Another High Court decision (*Thakurani Dasi Vs Bishesur Mukherji*, 1864) substituted the Rule of Proportion for this doctrine. The enhanced rent should bear, the Rule laid down, to the previous rent the same proportion that the increased gross value of the produce bears to the previous gross value.

The *direct* role of the Rule in the enhancement of rent by zamindars was not much significant, mainly because of their small success in this in the civil courts, particularly after the Bengal Act VIII of 1869. To win suits in the courts zamindars had to comply with a number of formalities. The onus of establishing their case by full legal proof lay entirely on them. Suits were sometimes rejected because evidence on the past history of prices and rent was found inadequate and the notices of enhancement were not served strictly according to law. As long as revenue officers tried the enhancement cases zamindars won very many suits despite their failure to furnish the necessary evidence. 'The Revenue Officers seem to have entered upon the cases . . . with the knowledge that, as a rule, prices of produce had risen very much since . . . 1857 (say), and that, where rents had not been recently revised, they were in general far below the normal competitive rates ; hence they were satisfied with such evidence as was adducible'.<sup>116</sup> With the transference of rent cases to the civil courts by the Act VIII of 1869, the position of zamindars became far more difficult. The courts, unlike the revenue officers, did not start with the assumption that prices had risen, but relied exclusively on the ordinary rules of evidence. Rules regarding the process of serving enhancement notices were made much more rigid. 'The zamindars soon found that a large proportion of their suits were defeated by preliminary objections, and even when they did reach a trial on the merits, so difficult was it to supply such evidence as would satisfy the courts, that almost without exception the cases broke down'<sup>117</sup>.



It was in the Government estates—Tuskhali (Bakarganj), Jalamuta and Majnamuta (Midnapur) etc.—that the Rule was mostly applied, which, however, necessitated special legislation. The enforcement of the enhanced rates of rent was a difficult job for revenue officers and, as we shall see later, caused widespread peasant resistance.

The initial failure of zamindars in getting rent rates enhanced through civil courts led them to rely on either a systematic falsification of the village *patwari* papers and perjury or the exercise of some coercive methods for the enforcement of an enhanced rent rate without any use of the legal machinery. An attempt to enhance rent on the ground of the so-called *paraganah* rate, which was mostly fictitious, led invariably to similar consequences. In most cases the institution of rent suits in the civil courts was a mere pretence, and was really intended as a continuous harassment of peasants, so that they would ultimately give in. All these affected agrarian relations and the nature of rent as well. The result of the organised falsehood, perjury and coercion was to heighten the bitterness of feeling between zamindars and peasants and to deepen mutual distrust and suspicion—a phenomenon which struck all the Government officers investigating the origins of agrarian unrest. As for rent rates, they were increasingly becoming divorced from economic circumstances, and their size tended to be determined by the relative success of zamindars in the use of non-legal and illegal means.

What led the zamindars to enhance rent? In explaining this, most contemporaries, including some Government officers with an anti-zamindari bias, emphasised what they called personal despotism of zamindars and entirely ignored objective circumstances. The whole enhancement process, involving much coercion for peasants and causing them immense distress, may be described as despotic. But it would be wrong to say that the drive for enhancement itself derived from 'despotic' human nature.

Zamindars proceeded to enhance rent because in most cases such an enhancement was an unavoidable economic necessity, because they badly needed an addition to their income. We do not mean that rent tended to be stationary where this necessity did not exist. It is undeniable that zamindars sometimes enhanced rent because they knew it was perfectly legal for them to do so and not because of any urgent economic needs. Two particular circumstances prompted a ready exercise of this pure legal right by zamindars. First, the symptoms of increasing resistance of peasants to the payment of illegal cesses, most of which had been paid for generations before, persuaded zamindars to enhance the rate of rent in order to maintain the existing level of their income. Secondly, an apprehension that the new rent law would be a dreadful measure, reducing or completely eliminating their authority in the villages and fixing the rent rates once for ever, led many panicky zamindars to enhance rent as far as possible before the day of doom came.

Pressing economic needs were powerful motives behind the drive for enhancing rent. A persistent theme of a number of tracts written by



zamindars themselves and of some periodicals of Bengal was the financial difficulty of zamindars. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote on 11 August 1871: 'A civilian judge is better off'. The Bengal Board of Revenue remarked in 1878: 'a very large proportion of the zamindars of the Lower Provinces are deeply involved; they have drawn upon their capital by pledging the whole or part of their estates to make up the successive deficits'.<sup>118</sup> The difficulty resulted from income lagging behind expenditure. To the contemporaries the explanation of this was very simple: a more or less fixed income could not support the increasing number of zamindars' dependants. The difficulty was aggravated by the rising cost of living, resulting partly from the increasing commodity prices and partly from the wider use of expensive luxury goods. With increasing peasant unrest necessitating institution of very many rent-suits in courts, the cost of management of estates tended to go up. The appointment of highly paid managers, including Europeans,—a practice increasingly being adopted by zamindars in order to more efficiently tackle the growing problems of estate management—added to the cost. The breaking up of large joint estates into numerous petty estates—a phenomenon particularly important in Bihar—enormously increased the aggregate cost of management. The imposition on zamindars of new taxes and cesses—as, for instances, income tax, road cess, Public works cess, *chowkidari* tax, municipal tax etc.—further added to the cost where they did not succeed in shifting their incidence on to peasants. Whatever the reasons, zamindars with a very few exceptions, were not enterprising enough to invest their resources in the new trade and industry, nor in the improvement of agriculture in their estates. Zamindars under these circumstances had to rely more and more on deriving a larger income from land. Where an extension of cultivation did not provide it, the only means open to them was to enhance rent of their ryots.

All evidence confirms the general feeling of the contemporaries that rents had risen in the period under review. There were some exceptions. For instance, a statistical enquiry in 1872-73 in Rangpur brought out the fact that the enhancement of rent in recent years had been very small.<sup>119</sup> Glazier, Officiating Magistrate and Collector of Rangpur, thus observed: 'Act X (of 1859) has not been worked so as to result in any general increase of rent, and there can be no doubt that in this district the ryots have in a much larger degree than the zamindars participated in the profits arising from the increased value of produce.'<sup>120</sup> In the absence of detailed statistics we can not conclude whether zamindars preferred a larger number of *abwabs* to the more conspicuous process of legal enhancement.

It is, however, difficult to quantify the phenomenon of the enhancement of rent for the whole of Bengal. Discussions over the various Rent Bills (1880-85) encouraged attempts at such quantification. Finucane, Deputy Collector of Gaya, who had already established his reputation for his skill in handling agricultural statistics, thus estimated the extent of



the enhancement of rent in some select districts of Bengal and Bihar in the period 1793-1880 by comparing the rental of zamindars at the time of the Permanent Settlement with the existing one as shown by the road cess valuation.<sup>121</sup>

*How many times the present rental exceeds rental at the time of the Permanent Settlement.*

Fatna	...	...	2·6
Gaya	...	...	3·4
Sahabad	...	...	2·1
Muzaffarpur	...	...	3·9
Darbhangha	...	...	4·8
Saran	...	...	3·0
Champaran	...	...	3·4
Burdwan	...	...	1·5
Midnapur	...	...	1·7
Hugli	...	...	1·5
24-Parganas	...	...	1·8
Nadia	...	...	1·8
Murshidabad	...	...	1·6
Dinajpur	...	...	1·2

Finucane, however, did not specify how much of the enhancement resulted from increased cultivation, nor did he quantify the extent of enhancement in our particular period. There are precise statistics for some districts. While investigating the rent rates in the Narhan estate in the district of Darbhanga in 1883, Finucane found that rent had risen by 136% in the past forty years. Since there had been 'no increase in the productiveness of soil', the only legal ground for enhancement was a rise in prices, which was only 73% in the same period.<sup>122</sup> A statistical enquiry by Collin in some select villages in Muzaffarpur in 1886-87 shows an increase of rent 137% since 1840, and Collin believed that 'the greater part of the increase has taken place in the last fifteen or twenty years'.<sup>123</sup> Enquiries by Stevenson Moore<sup>124</sup> in the years 1892-99 in some villages of the same district revealed a similar phenomenon. Since 1843 rent rose by from 115% to 192%, except in one village where the percentage of increase was 62. In the same period cultivation had increased by only 14%.

#### PEASANT RESISTANCE.

How did peasants react to the changes, particularly to the ones which had adversely affected them, which the two preceding sections have dealt with? Apart from the fact that these reactions had a role in partly counter-acting these changes, they constitute a significant phenomenon in the agrarian history of Bengal. We shall mainly deal with combined resistance of peasants.



The cultivation of two commercial crops, poppy and indigo, had adverse consequences for peasants. Resistance of poppy peasants was, however, a rare phenomenon. Official reports occasionally referred to the assembly of discontented peasants bound by a pledge not to grow poppy any more unless the price for crude opium had been increased. Government could not afford to ignore it, particularly when the resultant fall in the extent of cultivation was likely to adversely affect its opium revenue. An increase in the cultivators' price removed the source of their discontent. Two important circumstances, apart from others, largely accounted for the absence of any sustained resistance of poppy peasants—(a) the predominant role of *khatadhars*, who were mostly the village moneylenders, in planning and organising poppy cultivation; (b) the legal right of peasants to abandon poppy cultivation if they did not like it (though many extra-legal circumstances prevented them from taking advantage of the right). Any resistance to poppy would involve peasants, some way or other, in a resistance to the moneylenders; and for obvious reasons, they were careful not to antagonise the moneylenders. Where peasants could freely exercise the right of abandoning cultivation resistance was unnecessary.

The cultivation of indigo universally provoked resistance. It assumed the most extensive form in 1860, and the indigo industry in Bengal proper very nearly collapsed under it. There were isolated instances of such resistance even before 1860. In view of the extremely unremunerative nature of indigo cultivation and of the coercive methods adopted by indigo planters, these were natural.<sup>125</sup> The *ferazi* movement of both Barasat (1831-32) and Faridpur (1846) showed a strong anti-indigo feeling. In 1854 peasants of a Jessore Factory resolutely fought back the planter's attempt to get indigo sown by force, and the *Nizamat Adalat* set the peasants free 'giving them credit for having only asserted the natural right of defence of their own property, which the aggressive acts of their assailants had encroached upon'. In 1854 the Judge of Nadia observed: 'the violent outrages that from time to time spring from the sowing of indigo indicate an unwillingness on the part of the ryots to place their lands at the service of the planters'. The resistance in these cases had the usual form of a spontaneous outburst confined to some limited regions. Co-operation of other classes like zamindars gave it at times a wider basis and greater vigour. The programme of peasants was most often one of defeating for the time being the planters' move for a forcible cultivation of indigo. Various developments tended in course of time to make peasants more determined against indigo, and the programme they set themselves was the complete overthrow of the indigo system.

An important consequence of the failure of the Union Bank (1847) was to make the indigo cultivation far more repugnant to peasants than before. With this failure the most important source of planters' capital was gone. They now became more careful in collecting arrears of rent from peasants and more cautious in making fresh advances. Peasants not producing enough were asked to work off old balances. The normal source



of capital having failed, planters intensified their drive to get indigo cultivated with paying as little as possible for peasants' land and labour. The cost of living and the general cost of cultivation tended to rise, particularly since the Mutiny, as a result of a rise in the price of commodities including bullocks, bullock carts and ploughs, and the consequence of a continued association with indigo was a further worsening of the living conditions of the indigo peasants. The continuous rise in the price of most agricultural produce made them more bitter about indigo. Some peasants of Barasat, involved in a major clash with the Habrah factory in 1856 over their refusal to sow indigo, thus defended their stand before the Joint Magistrate of the district: 'they will not sow indigo for this very sound reason that they find tobacco and other crops far more profitable'. Even an alarming rise in the number of such overt acts of hostility towards planters could not persuade them to pay peasants a higher price for indigo. When the situation was thus ripe for a revolt, peasants were much encouraged in this by other circumstances, one of which was the deepening indignation of the entire society at the indigo system. It was mercilessly criticised in the journals of the time. Such an indignation reached its height during the historic agitation over the 'Black Bills' of 1849. The Bills designed to bring the British-born subjects under the jurisdiction of local criminal courts were vehemently opposed by the British indigo planters. The Bengal intelligentsia condemned their attempts to defend racial discrimination, and a bitter resentment was sweeping over the country. The formation of a new political association, the British Indian Association (1851), following the agitation, with the avowed purpose of protecting people's rights, was a measure of the depth of popular indignation. Peasants thus found the entire society bitter against the planters—a development immensely encouraging to them. What finally touched off the explosion was a widespread feeling among peasants that Government itself had been of late becoming more and more critical of planters. A deep-rooted belief that Government was partial towards planters had so long deterred them from any active resistance to planters, and even the slightest indication that Government had disapproved of planters' actions prompted them to resist. The *parwana* (order) of Abdool Luteef, Deputy Magistrate of Jessore, to Mackenzie, an indigo planter, forbidding him to forcibly cultivate peasants' land with indigo (1854) and the public expression of hostile opinion against compulsory cultivation of indigo by Mangles, Magistrate of Nadia, in 1855 were immediately followed by the abandonment by peasants of their indigo cultivation on a large scale. Peasants owed their courage to finally strike to two decisions of Eden, Magistrate of Barasat. The first decision (March 1859), on a petition by peasants, vindicated their right to grow whatever crops that suited them. Police force was sent 'to prevent any disturbances that are likely to ensue from any compulsory cultivation of their lands'. In August 1859 Eden went much farther. Eden thus explained to the Deputy Magistrate of Kalarua (Jessore) the appropriate line of action for the local administration in indigo



disputes. The first duty of a policeman would be to protect the peasants in the possession of their lands. It was exclusively their concern to decide how to use their lands, and they did not forfeit this right to protection because of any 'promises' to sow indigo. An examination of such documents was a function of civil courts and any use of force on these pretexts would be opposed by the police. The Deputy Magistrate's *parwana* of 20 August 1859, based on Eden's instructions, set off the spark which started the fire. Ryots from remote districts flocked to Barasat to get authenticated copies of Eden's order. 'It (the *parwana*) was made known by beat of drums at all the principal bazars on the market day'. Blumhardt, a missionary, remarked: 'The sum and substance of the *parwana* spread far and wide .....it was a common bazar talk; everybody talked it'. Peasants construed the *parwana* to have given them the right to throw up the cultivation wherever possible. Herschel, coming to the district of Nadia in February 1860, found that 'there appeared among the ryots a general sense of approaching freedom. They behaved as if about to be released from something very oppressive and as if impatient of the slowness of the process'.

The resistance movement, at first a constitutional agitation in the form of sending numerous petitions to the local administration praying for protection against the forcible cultivation of indigo, assumed at times and in some regions violent forms. Factories were burnt, indigo plants were destroyed, factory servants beaten or killed and the scheme of boycotting the numerous groups connected with indigo factories rigorously followed. The planters' devices to break the resistance by enforcing the temporary contract law of 1860 and by utilising the institution of rent as a method of coercion could not go far enough towards solving the crisis. The nearly complete destruction of the indigo industry in Bengal proper can thus be attributed to this resistance movement. Some patches of cultivation still remained, without any basic reform in the system. In 1883 and again in 1889-90 the planters of Jessore had to face a general revolt. By that time the market for Bengal indigo had been shrinking, and the low market price for it made any reform by increasing the cultivators' price out of the question.

The class bitterness produced by the indigo system was not any less intense in Bihar. The widespread revolt of indigo peasants in Darbhanga and Champaran in 1866-68 and the continuing tension ever since contradicted the assumption of the Indigo Commission (1860) that Bihar had a sound system of indigo cultivation. During the revolt in Darbhanga towards the close of 1866, which was confined to the villages in the Pandul Concern of Gale, a planter holding farming leases from the zamindar of Darbhanga, indigo was almost everywhere replaced by cold weather crops. An increase in cultivators' price and the cancellation of subleases (*kutkena*) to factory servants—a device of planters to strengthen control over peasants—pacified peasants for the time being. They became restive again in 1868, particularly in the regions contiguous to the Bettiah estate in



Champaran which was at the time the main centre of indigo peasants' resistance. The movement in the Bettiah estate had a much wider basis and derived its strength from the participation of many social groups other than peasants. These other groups were affected by the way the indigo planter Gibbon managed the encumbered estate of Bettiah after he took over as manager in 1866. One of the immediate means for achieving his main object, that is, to augment the income of the estate in order to extricate it from its financial difficulties, was the abolition of age-old privileges of these groups in respect of the amount of revenue payable to the zamindar of Bettiah and, in several cases, the entire elimination of some middlemen groups. The indigo peasants' revolt coincided with this drive for reorganising the estate's finances. It is immaterial to ask whether peasants first started the anti-indigo agitation in which other malcontents participated later or the malcontents themselves incited the peasants to rebel. Whatever the way the revolt had started, it soon developed into a united resistance movement of various groups and peasants had a definite programme of their own to uphold. Beames, appointed Magistrate of Champaran in 1866, found a 'spirit of quiet, determined opposition which was growing among the ryots', and was proud to think that peasants, finding in him 'a magistrate who would do justice impartially between them and planters, judged the time opportune for rising and resisting the oppressors'.<sup>126</sup> His intervention persuaded planters to a compromise, which, however, did not work for long. The flare-up in 1868, affecting a much wider region, assumed such a serious form that the Magistrate had to call out the military to protect the station of Motihari. Planters promptly responded by increasing the cultivators' price and promising a fair wage for their labour. Resistance on such a wide scale did not occur again, but peasants continued to be bitter about indigo. In 1873 a movement for abandoning indigo started in the Concerns of Pandul, Nararh and Harsinghpur in Darbhanga, the immediate cause being a widespread rumour that all the leases to planters would be soon resumed by the Darbhanga *raj*. 'This rumour . . . in some instances took the form of authoritative absolution from indigo agreements and from paying balances of rent to the outgoing farmers'.<sup>127</sup> While visiting Bihar in 1873, Campbell, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, was 'surrounded by clamorous complainants, and it needed but a spark or a word to create a conflagration and bring the whole (indigo) system to the ground'.<sup>128</sup> Macdonnell, Collector of Darbhanga, observed in 1876 that but for the change from the *ryoti* to the *zerai* cultivation and the intervention of the famine of 1874, 'there would be scarcely a *beegah* of indigo cultivation in this district'.<sup>129</sup> In the following year he thus summed up the situation: 'The indigo system in this district and generally throughout the Division has reached a crisis'.<sup>130</sup>

The absence of any combined resistance to moneylenders, except in Rajshahi (1836) and Sonthal Parganas (1854-55), despite their obvious role in the destitution of peasants may seem surprising, but it is explain-



able. The absence of any sharply differentiated moneylending group, the fact that the occasions on which peasants borrowed, the amount they borrowed, the rate of interest at which they borrowed and the general conditions of payment varied from person to person made any such resistance virtually impossible. In fact peasants did not want the moneylenders completely eliminated for the very simple reason that they could not do without them. On the other hand, they had no means of making the system of moneylending fair to them. They could go to civil courts to contest the rate of rent that zamindars demanded of them, but no Government law sought to regulate the rate of interest. They could bring any particular cases of exactions by moneylenders to the local *panchayats*, but it was an attempt at a compromise and not a move for resistance. The revolt of the Sonthals against moneylenders is also explainable. The agricultural settlements of Sonthals, who had in fact migrated from other regions, necessitated a much greater dependence on moneylenders than in other parts of Bengal, and this coupled with the absence in the newly settled areas of the usual restraints of a Hindu society and that the Sonthals were not familiar with these exactions till they came into contact with the moneylenders enabled moneylenders to enforce harder terms on the Sonthals. The fact that moneylenders constituted a group entirely alien to the close-knit tribal society of the Sonthals made them all the more bitter about the intruders. They looked back fondly to their ideal society of the past, which was free from these exactions, and firmly believed in the possibility of restoring the good old days. This dream animated them and they could strike at the enemy with a clear sense of purpose. The resistance of the Sonthals in this case was the resistance of the entire tribal community, because moneylenders did not deal with individual Sonthals, but with the whole community through its *manjha* (headman).

Combined resistance of peasants against enhancement of rent, in both Government and zamindari estates, was a significant feature of the agrarian history of Bengal in the second half of the 19th century. We discuss separately the revolt of the Sonthals, which had a complex origin and a distinct character of its own. It started with attacks on moneylenders, but it had a far wider basis. It was also against zamindars, the local administration and the entire European community, particularly the one connected with the construction of new railways. Zamindars were disliked, and also Government, because Sonthals had to pay them rent. In fact such was their abhorrence of rent that they did not mind throwing up settled cultivation, which their strenuous labour for years made possible, and migrating in search of new lands where they had not to pay any rent. The anti-Government feeling had a deeper source. The Sonthals had been long complaining of the exactions by moneylenders and zamindars without any success in persuading Government to take any measure to stop them. On the contrary, when sheer desperation led the Sonthals to use violent means for finding a remedy, Government promptly



punished them. The origin of the hostile feeling against the European community and the local assistants engaged in the construction of railways is well worth investigation. The official report on the origins of the Sonthal insurrection practically ignored the question. We have no evidence to prove that the introduction of railways resulted in any considerable export of the local food-grain, which might have raised its price and thus caused distress to the Sonthals or that any significant changes in the economy occurred which had adversely affected them. We have, however, evidence regarding certain kinds of injuries that the Sonthals suffered. For instance, railway contractors, in view of the known aversion of Sonthals to wage labour over a long period, had to practise much deceit and, occasionally, force for the recruitment of the necessary labour. The Sonthals were sometimes cheated over the rate of payment. The settlement of a large group of people engaged in railway construction necessitated a steady food-supply. In not a few cases, which were in fact investigated by the Magistrate of Bhagalpur, goats, kids, fowls etc. of Sonthals were carried off by force or on a nominal payment.

The insurrection of 1855 was all in vain. Important administrative changes followed it, but they could scarcely remove the causes of discontent of the Sonthals. With new developments the discontent tended to deepen, exploding into revolt in 1871-72 and 1880-81, while in the intervening period it manifested itself in various other forms. The significant developments were: 1. gradual weakening of the institution of *manjhi* (headman), the elimination of the *manjhis* in very many cases and the substitution of strangers for them; 2. enhancement of rent; 3. the increasing control of moneylenders and a rapid rise in the number of alienated holdings of peasants. The Sonthal *manjhis*, who had so long held a high position in the Sonthal village community, leading new agricultural settlements, presiding over all sacred religious rites and representing the community to the outside world, had been fast losing their position. Zamindars treated them as ordinary farmers, holding them liable to pay increased rent demanded of them or simply changing them for strangers who agreed to pay. This happened particularly where zamindars appointed Europeans as managers of their estates. Apart from the *ghatwali* zamindars deeply indebted to alien traders and moneylenders, numerous large estates coming under the control of the Court of Wards after the Mutiny and some enterprising zamindars like Raja Lilananda Singh (about whom the *Report on the Administration of the Sonthal Parganas* of 1862 says: 'The Rajah appears to act on the conviction that an English farmer is a better hand at raising rents and fighting the battle of enhancement through the courts than a native') preferred to farm their estates to Europeans. The European farmers also took the lead in using the Rent Act X of 1859 (introduced in the Sonthal Parganas in 1863) for enhancing peasants' rent, entirely ignoring the inappropriateness of such a law to the tribal setting of the agrarian economy in the Sonthal Parganas. In fact the Government experiment of administering the



district (formed in 1855 by Regulation 37 of 1855) with a special kind of laws suiting its particular needs and circumstances had to be abandoned in 1863 when the Advocate-General declared *ultra vires* this Regulation which outlined these special measures. The fact that Money, Commissioner of Bhagalpur and Sonthal Parganas at the time, subscribed to the views of the European farmers strengthened the latter's position. He thus stated his views on the *manjhi* question: 'To recognise as inherent to their position a right of occupancy would be not only acting contrary to the provisions of Act X, but would thus perpetuate a mode of tenure which may in time prove unsuited to the improvement and progress of the country'.<sup>131</sup> He did not believe that the Sonthal peasants required any special protection against enhancement of their rent: 'The main point to be kept in view is that the rights of zamindars and ryots are the same in the Sonthal Parganas as they are outside'.<sup>132</sup> In 1872 the Government of Campbell revived the experiment of 1855, but the injury that the reversal of the experiment resulted in inflicting on the Sonthals could scarcely be undone. Government could not find any solution for the *manjhi* question. The new land revenue assessment beginning in 1872 resulted in fact in enhancing the rent of peasants, particularly where strangers completely replaced the Sonthal *manjhis* and were responsible for the distribution of the lump communal assessment among the individual *Sonthals*. An immediate consequence of the enhancement of rent on the one hand and the definition of peasants' status in land by the new land settlement of 1872 was a quick rise in the number of mortgages of peasant holdings to moneylenders and their eventual sale to them.

These developments tended to disrupt the basis of the Sonthal community, and the revolt of the Sonthals was not one of any differentiated class of peasants (which in fact did not exist) but of the entire community. Sonthals bitterly resented the elimination of their *manjhis* not only because their rent was thereby considerably enhanced, but also because the existence of the community without its headman, who was a part and parcel of the social and religious life of the Sonthals, was utterly inconceivable to them. They did not know how to adjust their community to the intrusion of a host of strangers, whose primary function was to collect a larger rent from them. The increasing alienation of lands to moneylenders further strengthened these incompatible elements in the community. Despite their best intentions Government laws did not make this adjustment any easier, since the notions that these laws embodied were far from appropriate to the Sonthal society. Some Government officers with an intimate knowledge of the Sonthals realised it. For instance, Allen of Birbhum writes: 'It is this disruption of the people as a people that I believe mainly provokes the indignation of the Sonthals. They feel themselves in a net and know not which way to escape and our system of laws unfortunately allows them none. Those laws are constructed on the principle of the rights of the individual. They know nothing of the Sonthal village but as a collection of individuals. For



the protection of an individual the right of occupancy under Act X of 1859 affords ample provision ; for the protection of the Sonthal village none. . . . The point I am most anxious to enforce is the necessity of abandoning our English notions of the rights of the individual and so moulding the law that it shall be capable of recognising the Sonthal view of the rights of the village.<sup>1133</sup> The realisation of the Sonthals that such an adjustment was not possible within the existing framework explains the nature of the programme that the rebel Sonthals set themselves: an entire rejection of all the changes that the new economic relations and legal set-up had brought to the Sonthal society and the restoration of this society in its pristine purity.

The combined resistance of peasants in Government and zamindari estates fundamentally differed from the Sonthal revolt, the main difference consisting in the absence in these estates of any such radical programme of entirely rejecting the existing property relations.

The first Government estate to be affected by such resistance was Tushkhali in the district of Bakarganj. Till 1874 it was leased to farmers. During the first phase of the resistance, 1855 to 1858, the farmer was the zamindar of the Taki estate. It was organised by a group of middlemen, variously known as *abadkar*, *osut talukdar* and *mazul* who reclaimed waste lands with the help of peasants. The revolt started when the farmer decided to eliminate this middlemen group in order to appropriate the entire amount paid to it as rent by ordinary peasants. To isolate the mazuls from the peasants, the farmer offered the latter quite liberal terms, but the hold of *mazuls* over them was too strong to be thus shaken. In fact some measures of the farmer antagonised peasants and thus defeated his own strategy of keeping *mazuls* and peasants disunited. Some of these measures were strikingly new and seldom adopted in the zamindari estates, the novelty deriving from the particular enterprises of the farmer. He was engaged in reclaiming waste lands, and peasants had to contribute, under compulsion, to the cost of this reclamation by paying a rupee per *bigah* (*kathi khuruch*). The labour requisitioned for it was poorly paid for. The farmer traded in grain ; so peasants were forbidden to sell their grain to any other agency and had to surrender it at a price much below the market rate. To these were added most of the usual exactions practised in the zamindari estates. The particular measure of the farmer which caused the final explosion was to force peasants surrender to him their *pattahs* and receipts of payment. This was a shrewd device to persuade Government to renew his lease, due to expire in 1859, by inflating the actual figure of arrears of rent due from peasants and by showing that the rent rate paid by peasants had been moderate—a pretension or the peasants would be unable to refute without their *pattahs* and receipts of payment. The initial form of resistance was to send 'petitions by the hundreds' to the local administration, but some violent means were adopted later. The frightened farmer absconded at night, with an order to his agents 'to burn down the ryots' houses and to sow their



*bheethas* (homesteads) with *sursoo* (oilseed)'.<sup>134</sup> The farmer during the next phase of the resistance movement, 1870-74, was Morrell who held the estate at short leases for a period of eight years between 1858 and 1871. In 1871 the lease was renewed for 20 years, for which Morrell offered to Government a yearly increase in revenue of Rs. 15,000. Like his predecessor Morrell used the lease for recruiting labour for reclaiming waste lands in the Sunderbans and for the benefit of his extensive grain trade. To make good his promise of paying a larger revenue to Government the farmer hastened to enhance rent of peasants. The sudden increase in rent was enough to provoke resistance. Peasants' will to resist was fortified by their knowledge that Campbell, the new Lieutenant Governor, was hostile to the system of farming out Government estates. The extraordinary rapidity with which the rebel peasants united to resist was partly due to the influence of *ferazi* over the Tushkhali peasants. The Commissioner of Dacca thus commented on the nature of the movement: 'I regard this movement as a return to the old form of combination among Mahomedans in Eastern Bengal. . . The ferazees boast that their combinations banished indigo planters from Fureedpore, and it will take very little to incite them to get rid of zamindars altogether'. As in 1855 the core of the resistance and the leadership was provided by substantial peasants-cum-middlemen, and the main form of resistance was a protracted legal fight in the civil courts.

The resistance was too strong for Morrell to overcome, and he gave up the lease. Government, as soon as it took over, asserted its right to enhancement, and relied on 'firm and strong' measures for enforcing it. Temple thus outlined the Government policy in his Minute of 1 January 1875: '(Government) demand . . . should be exact in a manner quiet and considerate, but still firm, so firm that the ryots who are reputed to be of a somewhat turbulent character may at once see that we are not going to be trifled with'. The policy was executed with a ruthless determination, but the continuing legal fight for a long time after 1874 shows that peasants did not immediately give in.

Government faced the stiffest opposition to its plan of enhancing rent in the estates of Jellamuta and Majnamuta in Midnapur, and it responded by taking unprecedentedly rigorous measures. Richard Garth, Chief Justice, Calcutta High Court, observed that the Jellamuta estate case 'illustrates in a remarkable way the extraordinary powers which the Government possess over their tenants in the province and the severity with which those powers may be exercised'.<sup>135</sup> The origin of the resistance, as in Tushkhali after 1874, was the drive to enhance rent on the ground that the value of produce had increased. The new settlement (1877-78) by Price, Settlement Officer of Midnapur, increased rent in Jellamuta from Rs. 93,127 to Rs. 1,65,917 and in Majnamuta from Rs. 1,12,348 to Rs. 1,85,462. Such an enormous increase was everywhere resisted by peasants, and Government had to pass special laws to cope with the situation. For instance, the Bengal Council Act III of 1878 provided that a



higher rent recorded by a Settlement Officer would be assumed to be a fair rent unless the contrary was proved by peasants. They were allowed only four months after the notice of enhancement to bring suits to contest it. After further measure to facilitate the collection of enhanced rent was the Public Demands Act (Bengal Council Act VII of 1880) by which a mere certificate recorded *ex-parte* by a Collector that a sum of money was due from any person on account of a public demand could be executed as a decree. The persistence of the resistance despite all these was a measure of its strength.

In the zamindari estates, too, such a combined resistance had been developing. The recorded cases of this resistance show that it did not assume a spectacular form till 1873, despite increasing symptoms of a mounting tension. Towards the end of 1873 the Commissioner of Dacca wrote of 'agrarian combinations which have sprung into existence during the last five years'.<sup>136</sup> The only major resistance in this five-year period took place in 1869 in the Maimansingh pargana in Mymensingh. The peasants' revolt in 1873 in the Eshafshahy pargana of Pabna revealed for the first time the depth of agrarian discontent in the zamindari estates. It set off a series of revolts in other districts, for which it provided the model, though their scale was much smaller. In the district of Dacca the scene of the most active and widespread resistance was the Munshiganj *thana*, particularly the area of new alluvial formations, and a distinguishing feature of this was the predominance of *ferajis* among the rebels. By 1874-75 wider areas were affected. In Pabna itself the tension was far from resolved. The number of overt hostilities, involving loss of life and property, decreased entirely because of strong police measures, and Richard Temple predicted a fresh flare-up as soon as the police vigilance would have relaxed.<sup>137</sup> The Joint Magistrate thus summed up the situation in Pabna: 'the pargana (Eshafshahy) is at present, as in 1873, divided into two hostile camps, the rent unions are as strong as ever, and extra police are retained to keep the peace'.<sup>138</sup> Peasants of the Maimansingh pargana became restive again in 1874-75. Government interference prevented hostilities of the earlier kind, but class antagonism continued to intensify. About the same time the Uttarshapur estate of Dacca was convulsed by a revolt against the purchaser of the estate which had so long belonged to the indigo planter J. P. Wise. Here again the Collector's intervention resulted in temporarily ending the hostility, but the rent question, the basic issue in the conflict, was not solved. The widespread rumour that the Queen herself had ordered a general reduction of all rent rates reflected the peasants' conviction about the righteousness of their cause. A resistance movement of a comparable dimension had developed in 1875 in the Chagulnaya *thana* of Tippera. 'The ryots . . . have for some time past, it may be said, fairly carried the war into the enemy's country; they have combined to resist the farmers, . . . have entered into a league to pay no rent whatever, and to attack and drive away the farmers and their collectors of rent whenever they attempt to appear on the scene'.<sup>139</sup>



In view of the intensifying class bitterness Government passed the Agrarian Disputes Act in 1876—a special law authorising it to intervene to prevent breakdown of law and order. The resistance to the newly imposed *bankar* (rent for the cutting of wood) in the estate of Nawab Ashanullah and others in the Attia Sub-Division of Mymensingh in 1878 had a 'most serious' form. In 1880 the Commissioner of Dacca observed 'signs of a coming struggle' between the zamindar of the Attarabari estate of Mymensingh and his ryots, who had been 'forming unions to resist his demands'.<sup>140</sup> According to the Sub-divisional Officer of Madaripur, 'the turbulent character of the Sub-Division is solely attributable to the unsatisfactory state of the relation between zemindars and their tenants'.<sup>141</sup> In the same year the Sub-Divisional Officer of Bhola in Bakarganj wrote of the persistent opposition of zamindars to the establishment of new schools, since 'they are afraid that education would make the ryots more obstinate in withholding payments of their rents'. The Commissioner of Dacca went as far as to observe: 'The worst feature in Bakarganj and Faridpur is the dread of the zamindar of wealth and influence to live amongst their ryots'.<sup>142</sup> The trouble spot in Bakarganj in 1881 was the Mehdiganj *thana*, which was a stronghold of the *ferajis*, now led by Noah Meah, a son of the veteran *feraji* leader Dudu Meah. In the same year the peasants of Hoshainpur in Mymensingh 'made unions and maltreated all who sided with the landlord or paid any rent', and 'assaulted . . . several respectable men, such as the *tehsildar* and others on the landlord's side'.<sup>143</sup> The resistance movement soon affected the districts of western Bengal too. In July 1881 the Commissioner of the Presidency Division wrote of 'a tendency growing of late on the part of the ryot to assert his legal rights and to combine against anything that he considers an infringement of them'.<sup>144</sup> A distinguishing feature of the movement in the 1880s was the role of the agitation over the new Rent Bill in widening it. The Bill aroused extravagant expectations, and ignorant peasants construed it as a moral approval of their stand by Government. All sorts of rumours which agreed with the peasants' longing for better days were circulating: the despotic power of zamindars would be soon gone for ever, and with it the scare of enhancement; rent rate would be reduced everywhere and Government legislation would deprive zamindars of all powers to enhance it etc. As long as peasants had nothing to hope for, they remained tame. Hope now made rebels of them. The renewed offensive of peasants in the Maimansingh pargana in 1883-84, where the resistance movement had been growing since 1869, derived its strength from such hopes. The slogan of the movement, led by Maulavi Hamiduddin, a pleader of the district, was the restoration of the rent rate prevailing at the time of the Permanent Settlement. The illusion about the coming millennium was soon dispelled by widely publicised Government proclamations explaining the intentions and true scope of the Bill, but opposition to zamindars persisted. The reaction of zamindars—to strike before it was too late, i.e. to enhance rent as much as possible before the worst came



to the worst with the passing of the rent legislation—strengthened the will to resist.

The growth of the resistance movement had thus two distinct phases, the agitation over the Rent Bill having been the dividing line. The movement in the second phase was much wider, but its basis was not firm. It lost much of its strength with the disenchantment of peasants with the Rent Bill. The general resistance was a product of various circumstances. The Collector of Midnapur emphasised only one aspect of the question when he wrote: 'Enhancement is the principal disturbing cause in the harmony of rural life throughout the country. Whenever a *pergunnah* is in a restless, disturbed, troublesome state, the Magistrate need not ask what the cause is. He knows that beforehand.'<sup>145</sup> The role of such enhancement in the resistance was particularly important where it took place all of a sudden or its size was very large. But peasants resisted even moderate enhancements. This suggests a conscious plan of resistance to enhancement on principle, whatever its size. Campbell thus concluded from what he called a special enquiry on this subject of rents: 'the rent questions, which are cropping up in eastern districts, do not imply that rents are more racked there than elsewhere, but that the people have not yet submitted to rack-renting to the same extent as elsewhere'.<sup>146</sup> This organised and planned resistance, as distinguished from a spontaneous and desperate revolt of a group of deeply aggrieved peasants, can be explained by a number of circumstances. The increasing knowledge of peasants (or of their legal advisers) of the existing laws on the whole rent question was one. Charles, Joint Magistrate of Dacca, called it one of the 'chief permanent causes which may be assigned for the growing independence of ryots'.<sup>147</sup> This is largely due to the wider opportunities of having access to law with the gradual extension of the Sub-Divisional system, and to the more frequent discussion of the rent question in the vernacular journals, particularly after the Rent Act X of 1859 and the desperate attempts of the indigo planters at intimidating their rebel peasants into submission by indiscriminately enhancing rent. Peasants were encouraged to resist also because they knew that enhancement of their rent through civil courts was an extremely difficult process. This legal knowledge by itself could not cause the resistance without the participation and leadership of substantial peasants though the resistance was not invariably associated with such a leadership. In very many cases the resistance was organised primarily to defend their own particular interests. A later section deals with the origin and growth of a substantial peasantry. These comparatively prosperous and, consequently, self-confident peasants were more willing and in a far better position to resist zamindars than the common destitute peasants. Where peasants believed that Government sympathised with their cause, they could strike at the enemy with much greater confidence. It is doubtful if the resistance movement in Pabna (1873) would have been so widespread without Campbell's *parawana* legalising peaceful combination against zamindars. It was an unprecedented step.



The attitude of Nolan, Magistrate of Pabna, was equally reassuring to peasants. He did not go out of his way to support them, but the energy and tact with which he used the existing machinery of administration to suppress the exactions of zamindars put heart into them. A striking feature of the growth of the resistance movement was that its beginning in one region, whatever its success, encouraged similar movements elsewhere. It is probable that without the impulse provided by the first revolt, the subsequent revolts would not have taken place, at least at the time they did. The uprising in Pabna did not come as a surprise to the local Government officers, but the uprisings which soon followed in the neighbouring regions were entirely unexpected.

The programme of the rebels was modest and merely to prevent further enhancement of rent. Nowhere did they proclaim any radical plan of abolishing the institution of rent altogether. Peasants stopped paying rent at a certain phase of the movement, but that was a consequence of the deadlock over the question of rent. Till the civil courts decided the question or a compromise between peasants and zamindars could be reached over it, no rent was paid, because zamindars did not accept payment at the old rate. It is also remarkable that only rarely did peasants insist on the restoration of a rent rate prevailing long ago as a condition of this compromise. In Pabna they talked of restoring the rates of the days of the Natore *raj*; but the promptness with which peasants deposited rent at the Collector's office at the existing rate is evidence that they did not intend to rigidly adhere to their programme. The fight was mostly between occupancy ryots (who in very many cases were not cultivators at all, but substantial middlemen) and zamindars, and it was one as much for preventing further enhancement of rent as for a formal redefinition of the relationship between them. It is striking that the revolt did not in any phase lead to a review of the relationship between occupancy ryots and their undertenants, though these undertenants were drawn into the battle. There is much truth in the observation of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, the *Sadharani* and some other Bengali journals that the peasants' revolt was in fact one for the protection of the interests of the middle peasants.

It is interesting to compare this resistance movement with the indigo peasants' revolt. The latter, unlike the former, was not a revolt of peasants alone, though they provided the core of the resistance. Numerous other groups adversely affected by the indigo system participated in it. For instance, moneylenders who were eliminated by planters, petty zamindars who were forced into giving planters leases of their estates, a numerous group in the encumbered estates of Bihar who suffered a great deal, as we have seen, from the particular kind of management of these estates by the planters—all bore the planters a deep grudge and wanted the indigo system destroyed. With the growth of nationalist sentiment the indigo feeling tended to pervade the whole society. Even as far as the peasant community was concerned, the anti-indigo peasants' movement



was much more united and broad-based. The general indigo system—the system of cultivation, the system of paying the cultivators, the pattern of coercion devised to sustain the universally unremunerative cultivation of indigo and other related features—was very nearly the same everywhere. So the rebel peasants in one particular indigo region could reckon on sympathy and co-operation of their aggrieved brethren elsewhere. But despite the universality of rent enhancement as a phenomenon it did not affect all the peasants in a similar way. The methods of rent enhancement, the quantum of enhancement, the rank, status and number of peasants affected etc. varied from place to place. Moreover, the base of the movement arising out of the rent question was very narrow from the very beginning, since the programme of the movement entirely ignored the interests of undertenants, who constituted a considerable section of the cultivators' community.

It is also interesting to compare the Government attitude to the rent question with that to the general indigo question. Such a study is important in view of the significant role of Government measures, in any form, in changes in agrarian relations as affected by these two questions. As regards the first, Government was increasingly becoming aware of its importance and was convinced that it had a role to play in its solution. It is true that Government steps were sometimes hesitant. For instance, despite much fanfare, the grandiose plan of Campbell for the suppression of illegal *abwabs* collected by zamindars from peasants ended with a whimper. But it is undeniable as we shall see in the following section that the traditional policy of *laissez faire* had been largely abandoned. As regards the indigo question, however, Government adhered to the policy of *laissez faire*. Not that Government was unaware of the evils of the indigo system. The official investigation into the uprising of the indigo peasants of Champaran and Darbhanga (1866-68) brought to light a lot of them. Campbell admitted that 'The Behar indigo system is not altogether a healthy one fairly based on free trade, but it has about it elements of quasi-feudal compulsion'.<sup>148</sup> The official enquiry in 1876-78 revealed many more of these evils. Yet in 1866-68 Government was reluctant to do anything more than the mere maintenance of law and order. Even a man of an extraordinary reforming zeal like Campbell refrained from any active intervention. Temple thus laid down his policy: 'it is manifestly desirable to leave this matter as much as possible to be settled between the parties, Government merely affording legal protection against duress or coercion'.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, unlike J. P. Grant, who did not regret the total extinction of the indigo industry of Bengal which he believed the indigo peasants' revolt would eventually result in, the succeeding Lieutenant Governors, except Campbell, had a great faith in the positive role of indigo in the country's economy. Its disappearance, they concluded, would be a serious economic loss for the country.

Campbell thus justified his policy of non-intervention: 'The present indigo system in Tirhoot is certainly not one which the Government



would encourage or foster if it were a new thing, but it is so established that a change can not be too rapidly forced on without danger of serious embroilments and injury to all the parties'. Under the circumstances Government 'must rather look to gradual approach to free trade principles as fast as circumstances will permit'.<sup>150</sup> The policy of non-intervention in the subsequent period largely derived from a misconception of the origin of the antagonistic relations between planters and peasants. Even Campbell was not free from it. The root of the present tension, Government assumed, was the existing landlord-tenant relationship. The omnipotent zamindars could at present prevent their ryots from making any agreement directly with the planters for growing indigo. Consequently planters had to take leases of estates from zamindars by paying them an enormous price. This initial expenditure, Government believed, prevented planters from paying a remunerative price to peasants and eventually led them to devise coercive methods to make peasants grow an unremunerative crop. The real solution of the indigo question, Government concluded, would not be provided by occasional Government intervention whenever troubles had cropped up, but by a reorganisation of the landlord-tenant relationship resulting in the growing independence of ryots in using their lands in whatever way they liked. The contemplated revision of the rent law, Government believed, would make for such a reorganisation.

Such a version was, however, inconsistent with facts. It is true that zamindars demanded a heavy price for giving lease of their estates to planters. But the number of cases where planters got leases in this way was very small. In Bihar in most cases such a formal lease was unnecessary. Planters could get the necessary control over the management of estates in their capacity as mortgagees of these estates, mostly encumbered. They acquired this control without paying anything to zamindars. The fact that peasants were not paid a fair price for indigo even in these estates refuted the assumption of Government.

The resistance movement of peasants was significant in the agrarian history of Bengal in various ways. The revolt of the indigo peasants very nearly destroyed the whole indigo industry in Bengal. That the cultivation of indigo continued to prosper in the neighbouring districts of Bihar is evidence that market fluctuations had nothing to do with this destruction. The revolt of the indigo peasants in Bihar did not have such far-reaching consequences. But a revolt (as in 1866-68) or manifestations of hostile feelings of peasants in other forms (as in 1875-77) persuaded planters to take some steps towards redressing the grievances of peasants. The establishment of the Behar Indigo Planters Association (1877) with an elaborate programme of reform in the indigo system need not be dismissed as a mere hoax to persuade the Government not to intervene in favour of peasants. It is evidence that they considered it expedient to reform their system in some ways. The resistance movement connected with the rent question did not always succeed in preventing enhancement of rent. The



failure is particularly striking in the Government estates. It was as conspicuous in some zamindari estates too. For instance, in Pabna peasants could not hold out for long. Worn out by protracted battle they gave in in very many places. But they succeeded in not a few cases. When the administrative intervention resulted in a compromise (as in Mymensingh) zamindars could not enhance rent to the extent they wanted. In some places (as in J. P. Wise's estate, in the Munshiganj *thana*, Chagulnaya *thana* etc.) their success was greater. But whatever the immediate consequence of the resistance movement in any region, zamindars were more cautious in future in proceeding to enhance rent. The movement brought a significant change in the management of estates. The new craze for appointing highly-paid managers, who were in some cases Europeans, was particularly noticeable in the estates having a strong resistance movement. No less important was the fact that zamindars now insisted on the exchange of written *patta*hs and *kabuliats*. They wanted the terms of payment of rent and other dues precisely stated in the *patta*hs. The general trend everywhere was a wider use of legal means by zamindars and, consequently, a phenomenal increase in the number of civil suits. Zamindars did not bring the suits always out of a conviction that they had been defending a just cause. More often it was sheer vindictiveness, a method to wear out their recalcitrant peasants. The result was a deepening distrust between the two classes. Most contemporaries deplored this development, and some even went to the extent of attributing it to what they called over-legislation. The resistance movement was also significant in that it contributed to the process of differentiation in the peasantry, particularly where the substantial peasants who, as we have seen, led the movement in some cases, could succeed by it in preventing further enhancement of rent. Since the law did not protect their undertenants, the margin between what they paid to zamindars and what they received from the undertenants tended to widen. This increasing income provided a means to the substantial peasants to further consolidate their position, mostly by widening the scale of lending money to poor peasants and by purchasing the alienated holdings of the same.

#### RENT LEGISLATION

The intervention of Government to regulate by law the relations between zamindars and peasants constitutes a significant fact of the agrarian history of Bengal in the period under review. While in the long period of 1793-1858 Government rigidly followed a policy of non-interference, two laws—Rent Act X of 1859 and the Tenancy Act VIII of 1885—were passed in our period, and the rent question was one of the outstanding issues that agitated the official mind throughout the decade 1875-85. What led Government to intervene? How did Government look at the rent question as it affected agrarian relations? How did the rent laws affect these relations?



The only attempt at such an intervention in the period 1793-1858 was a regulation proposed by Harrington (28 November 1826) 'for more fully declaring and securing the rights of Koodcasht ryots and other permanent undertenants of lands'. Government entirely rejected the scheme. It did not seem practicable to Government. 'To fix the rent which every field shall pay to the landlord zamindar would be . . . as absurd as to fix the price of food or the wages of labour'.<sup>151</sup> Government did not think it desirable either. Increasing rent was a product of the developing resources of the country, and Government assumed that 'the ryots in Bengal of the present day have no right to participate in the profits arising out of the limitation of the Government demand'. In fact any legislation, Government believed, would be superfluous since 'few zamindars were so lost to all sense of their own interests as to raise the demand beyond the ability of the cultivators to pay without detriment to their stock'. Some Government officers like Ross, Judge of the Sadar Diwani Adalat, dismissed the proposed regulation as irrelevance. 'The comfort and happiness of the mass of the agricultural population can only be promoted by improving their conditions as labourers. . . . that can only be done by means calculated to raise the demand for their labour. . . .'. The means suggested by Ross were the 'establishment of a system of judicature. . . . the removal of impediments to commerce, both internal and external, and permission to Europeans to settle in the country with leave to hold land and to engage in agricultural as well as in manufacturing and commercial speculations'. It is interesting to note how Government views substantially agreed with those of the protagonists of European settlement in India—a subject widely discussed in England and India on the eve of the revision of the Charter Act.

The origin of the rent legislation of 1859 was misunderstood, even by Government of later years. For instance, Rivers Thompson (Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, 1882-87) thus explained it in a speech in the Viceroy's Council on 13 March 1883: 'It was only when. . . . the oppressions of the landlords threatened an agrarian revolution that the Government stepped in by a legislative enactment to arrest the natural increase of rent in Bengal, and the result was the land law of 1859'.<sup>152</sup> There is no evidence to show that the rent legislation of 1859 was designed to avert an 'agrarian revolution'. It was a liberal measure to remove some of the obvious abuses of existing laws, particularly of the law relating to distraint of crops and properties of peasants for the realisation of arrears of rent. While in Bihar, Dalhousie was repelled by utter perversion of the distraint law. The official investigation in 1854-55 into the working of the distraint law confirmed the personal experience of Dalhousie, and most of the Government officers agreed on the need to reform the law. The Protestant missionary societies of Bengal had a significant role to play in making the whole peasant question an urgent public issue of the time. The condition of the Bengal peasantry was the most important of the social questions discussed in the Conference of the



Protestant missionaries in Calcutta. (September 4-7, 1855). In two petitions to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (September 6, 1856 and December 15, 1856) the Bengal missionaries argued in favour of a 'royal commission to enquire into the conditions of the people of Bengal' comparable to the Devon Commission on Ireland during Peel's administration. In a petition to the House of Commons (June 11, 1857) they argued their case more forcibly. Once Government had been convinced of the need for a reform in the law, there was hardly anything to prevent it. Earlier suggestions for the modifications of the distraint law by reducing the powers of zamindars in this respect were invariably rejected on the ground that this would eventually adversely affect the security of Government revenue since Government thought without these powers zamindars would be unable to punctually collect their rent. There was no ground for such an apprehension now. The stability of the revenue system was unquestionable. The post-Mutiny 'aristocratic reaction', that is, the official policy supporting a closer alignment with zamindars for the sake of political security and stability had no visible impact in Bengal. Bengal escaped the worst effects of the Mutiny, and Government did not see any point in conciliating the zamindar class, already firmly entrenched in power. There was no organised opposition of zamindars themselves to the reform in the rent law. Certain sections of the Bengali intelligentsia warmly supported the move for this reform. In spite of its reluctance to 'join the senseless cry against the zemindars', the *Hindoo Patriot* hailed the Rent Bill of Currie (1857) and believed that its enactment would mark 'an era in the social history of Bengal'.<sup>122</sup> Government itself did not hesitate to pass the rent law in view of its extremely modest scope. The law did not amount to the assertion of any new principle. Government intended, as the preamble of the Rent Act X of 1895 says, 'to re-enact with certain modifications, the provisions of the existing law'.

In fact the law was more than a mere attempt at codification. Its novelty consisted in selection, emphasis and clarification. In some cases the clarification resulted in the introduction of new norms, and with change in objective circumstances the law acquired new meanings and the application of the law reacted on the objective circumstances themselves. Two major 'reforms' were effected. Zamindars could not any longer compel attendance of peasants at their courts (*kutchery*) for the adjustment of rent 'or for any other purpose'. Distraint was illegal for arrears of more than one year's standing or where peasants could provide security for the payment of arrears within a reasonable limit of time. The more important provisions were those relating to the rent question. Ryots were classified into three groups: 1. ryots holding at fixed rates; 2. occupancy ryots; 3. non-occupancy ryots. Ryots holding land at a rate unchanged for 20 years before the date of rentsuits brought against them by zamindars belonged to the first group. Zamindars could not enhance the rent of this group. Any ryot who 'has cultivated or held land' for a period of 12 years was an occupancy ryot, as long as he paid rent. Zamindars could



enhance their rent only where cultivation had extended, or where the rentrate of peasants was lower than what was called the *pargana* rate, or where the value of produce had increased. These legal restraints would not apply where peasants agreed by a written contract, to pay zamindars an enhanced rent. Ryots without the right of occupancy were not protected by law. Two new things in the law were the criterion of occupancy right and the permissibility of the enhancement of rent on the ground of increased value of produce. The first was the result of an oversight or of a genuine misunderstanding of local customs on the part of Government. The second was intended as nothing more than a guide to the revenue officers trying rent suits. The original Rent Bill treated all 'resident' ryots as occupancy ryots. The Select Committee considering the Bill introduced later the 12-year rule on the basis of some reports that such had been the universal custom in the North Western Provinces. These reports were evidently ill-informed. What they referred to as the 12-year prescription was in fact a local practice of allowing an ousted ryot a summary process for recovering his holding provided he could prove that he had held land for twelve years. It is surprising to find that the ground of enhancement of rent which we have referred to and which was later called by the Government of Bengal 'as the germ of all future trouble' was given a scant attention by the Select Committee. The evident intention was to leave it to the Collector to decide the quantum of enhancement and it was believed this ground of enhancement would be helpful to him in this.

The next landmark in the history of rent legislation was the Tenancy Act of 1885. Various circumstances necessitated it. In the beginning zamindars did not ask for any substantial changes in the Rent Act of 1859, since it scarcely adversely affected them, at least immediately. The abolition of their power to compel attendance of ryots at their courts and the change in regard to the method of distraint alarmed them, and they tried to persuade Government to revoke these changes by saying that the consequent diminution of their 'moral influence' would seriously impede the collection of rent and eventually depreciate the market value of their estates. Government dismissed these arguments as merely 'speculative'. Nowhere, Government pointed out, did the collection of rent suffer. Nor were more estates sold. Where these sales occurred, the sale proceeds convincingly refuted the prediction about the depreciation of zamindari estates in the market. In fact the alarm of zamindars gradually disappeared. As early as January 1861 the Collector and Magistrate of Nadia reported: 'even the zamindars have ceased to complain of the clause prohibiting compulsory attendance'. In some places zamindars continued to exercise their old powers, and this was largely because of the wide gap between the law and the local administrative practice. The old attitude of *laissez faire* died hard. As Joint Magistrate of Sahabad (1861) Beames expressed to the Collector his concern over the welfare of the peasantry and 'suggested intervention in cases where they were oppressively treated by the



zemindars'. He thus writes of the Collector's reactions and of the prevailing attitude: 'he laughed at me and told me it was no business of ours; the zamindar had a right to do what he liked with his ryots. My Panjabi zeal was in fact laughed down by all the Bengal men'.<sup>154</sup> Till 1869 the legal provision over which zamindars were most unhappy was the one relating to the occupancy right. The legislation of 1859 affected far more deeply the relations of planters as zamindars with their ryots, and the initiative for the revision of the rent law came from them. Planters too, like zamindars, deeply resented the abolition of the power of a zamindar to summon his ryots to his court, and condemned the Act X as 'the foundation of the ruin of every zamindar and *talookdar* of Bengal'. Larmour, Manager of the Bengal Indigo Company, observed that the Act would 'eventually destroy my influence over the ryots. The zemindar has heretofore possessed a certain degree of feudal right in which he has had the support of the Government; that right will be completely set aside'.<sup>155</sup> Under normal circumstances planters would not have faced greater difficulties than zamindars. But the revolt of the indigo peasants made all the difference. Peasants had been throwing up the cultivation of indigo everywhere, and planters planned to strike back by enhancing the rent of peasants as far as law would allow. But it was not an easy task. Peasants united to resist all enhancement. Planters wanted revisions in the rent law in order to carry out their plan of enhancement. They claimed very wide powers: 'A landholder in Bengal should have the same power of distraining on his ryots' lands and the same facilities for recovering his rents as a landholder in Middlesex is afforded by the laws of England'.<sup>156</sup> They suggested some specific changes. The Act of 1859 permitted peasants, in disputes with zamindars over the rate and amount of rent, to deposit their due rent at the existing rate with the Collector. Planters were bitter about it: 'This would be putting the landholders altogether on one side. Of what use would be our landed property under such circumstances'?<sup>157</sup> They wanted this clause immediately repealed. Planters were eager to measure all lands of peasants in order to enhance their rent. The Act of 1859 did not make compulsory peasants' presence at such measurements. Planters wanted a specified legal provision to this end. They wanted a more efficient process than the existing one for the realisation of rents 'by attachment of all property of the ryot'. They further insisted on the repeal of the provision relating to the occupancy right. What a planter valued most, as James Hills, a planter of Nadia put it, was the 'security against the introduction of interlopers into his property without his sanction and approval. Government did not accept any of these suggestions. It was, however, the suits brought by planters in the courts for enhancing the rent of their ryots on ground of an increase in the value of produce which revealed some imperfections of the existing rent law and necessitated enunciation of altogether new principles. The basic imperfection was that law permitted zamindars a share in the increased value of produce but it did not



lay down any precise rule for the determination of the size of this share. As we have seen in an earlier section, the principle propounded by Chief Justice Peacock in the case *Hills Vs Issur Ghose* (1862)—a typical rent suit brought by planters—was quite revolutionary. It was in course of a debate over the suitability of this principle to the particular agrarian situation in Bengal that Government for the first time recognised the need for a revision in the rent law. While reviewing the case in 1863 the Chief Justice of the High Court referred to it 'as an example of the difficulties which have been created by some provisions of the Act X of 1859, and of the vast amount of litigation, harassing both the landowners and ryots, which must necessarily arise unless that Act be amended'. Government, however, decided not to change the law, arguing that it would be no use changing that law without changing its fundamental principles and that Government did not feel time was ripe for such a fundamental change. The rent law was not changed, but Peacock's principle was soon challenged. Its weakness lay in its novelty. Trevelyan, Finance Member of Viceroy's Council, wrote to Wood, Secretary of State: 'He (Peacock) had disfranchised and reduced to the state of tenants-at-will the great body of Bengal ryots'.<sup>158</sup> Lawrence, Viceroy at the time, felt strongly over it, and was ready for a 'tough fight' with the antagonists of peasants' rights.<sup>159</sup> Henry Maine and Wood defended the rights of peasants, though such a defence was inconsistent with their political and economic assumptions. Wood wrote to Lawrence: It certainly is true that the right (of occupancy) is not very good, according to the principles of sound political economy'.<sup>160</sup> Maine wrote to Wood: 'I should be inclined to abolish occupancy rights altogether as a future institution'.<sup>161</sup> Their main concern was to preserve an established order which Peacock's principle threatened to overthrow. The reversal of Peacock's decision by the Full Bench of the High Court made unnecessary any legislative interference contemplated by Lawrence.

Other developments reinforced the argument in favour of a revision in the rent law. Zamindars followed the example of planters and had been increasingly using the new legal ground for enhancement of rent on the basis of the new Rule of Proportion which had replaced Peacock's rule. The new rule was unobjectionable as a principle, but in many cases zamindars found it practically unworkable, particularly after the transference of rent suits from the revenue officers to the civil courts in 1869. The attempts of frustrated zamaindars at illegal exactions to make up for the loss in not getting enhanced rent by legal means tended to intensify the existing bitterness between them and their peasants. An official enquiry during Campbell's administration established the point beyond any doubt. The revolt of the peasants in Pabna and other neighbouring districts was the first clear evidence to Government of this mounting class tension. Campbell, however, was still reluctant to reconstruct the rent law on the basis of new principles. His stand on the question was not consistent. His arguments for not attempting a revision of the law were mainly two:



(1) it was unnecessary ; (2) it was inexpedient. This is a contradiction. If revision was unnecessary the point whether it was expedient or not was irrelevant. It seemed unnecessary to him because 'the defects of the existing law were not yet fully developed, and I thought that in Bengal at any rate the ryots were sufficiently holding their own'.<sup>162</sup> He did not think that 'the evils are so undoubted that we can interfere thoroughly and effectually'. It was inexpedient because he did not think 'the political circumstances of the time sufficiently favourable'.<sup>163</sup> By unfavourable political circumstances he meant the strong probability of an opposition from the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. He was aware that Northbrook held views 'which were much more conservative than those on which I had been acting with the support of previous viceroys'.<sup>164</sup> He found that Northbrook 'was very much indisposed to any interference between landlord and tenant, and that any action on my part might bring into prominence a divergence of views'.<sup>165</sup> He went so far as to conclude: 'I had no doubt that if he had come sooner the reforms which I had already started would have been decidedly checked, and would never have reached maturity'.<sup>166</sup> In fact with increasing popular discontent over what the *Friend of India* called 'over-Government or Stracheyism', over excessive legislation, enhancement of land revenue, increased local cesses and imposts and, above all, income tax, Northbrook was more and more inclined towards a policy of non-interference.<sup>167</sup> The Secretary of State (Duke of Argyll) too was not quite in sympathy with Campbell's reform measures. 'Reports' of Campbell's 'intentions' touched 'the susceptibilities of the Duke of Argyll in regard to the position of landlords' and Argyll 'cautioned me against any undue interference with the rights which had been given by the fundamental laws of the Bengal system'.<sup>168</sup>

There is no doubt that under the circumstances an attempt at revising the rent law would have been inexpedient, but was Campbell right in thinking that such a revision was unnecessary? The findings of several enquiries during his own administration prove that his judgment was wrong. The main source of error in his judgement was his belief in the intrinsic vitality of customs to withstand changes brought by law and other circumstances. He entirely ignored the changing class relations which tended to affect the content of these customs. Much of the confusion in his thinking on the Irish land question, which he studied with great care, derived precisely from this source.

The class antagonism further intensified during the administration of Temple, and he took up the rent question in earnest. The distinctive feature of his approach to the question was his emphasis on the inevitability of a rise in rent. Like some contemporary political economists Temple believed: 'It is not possible, under the circumstances in Bengal, that rents should remain unchanged. If the value of land is to increase with rise in prices and the improvement of produce, it follows that there must be a moderate and gradual augmentation of rent throughout the country from time to time, enough to satisfy the landlords, while leaving a clear



and liberal margin of profit to the raiyat. If the material resources of the country are to grow and expand, if the culture of new staples is to flourish ..... if in short agriculture is to advance, then concurrently some augmentation of rent is to be expected, equitable, doubtless, and consistent with maintenance of a stable and valuable occupancy status for the raiyat, but still augmentation'.<sup>169</sup> How much of the produce could zamindars be allowed to take? Temple did not prescribe any fixed share. Zamindars, he suggested, could reasonably claim what was called 'competitive rate of rent'. This was how Government explained the concept: the size of the permissible enhancement would vary according to the difference between the rent of the tenants-at-will and that of the occupancy ryots. Zamindars could claim a certain portion of this difference. The bigger the difference the larger the quantum of enhancement. Temple proposed that the rent of the occupancy ryot should be less than that of the tenants-at-will by 20%. Temple suggested two other measures for helping the rent question towards a solution: the substitution of executive authority for the civil courts to expedite settlement of rent disputes and a summary law to facilitate realisation of undisputed arrears of rent. The complications resulting from long delays in the settlement of rent disputes by civil courts were quite commonplace by now, and to try to revoke the change of 1869 was a natural reaction of Government officers. But the plea for a summary law for the realisation of undisputed arrears was not justifiable. His argument that 75% of the rent-suits were suits for undisputed arrears of rent was a mere rehash of a very well-known complaint of zamindars. With the recent administrative measures making zamindars responsible for the collection of some new cesses, they insisted more and more on such a law. The Government of Eden admitted that 'loud and constant complaints' of zamindars in this respect persuaded Government to their point of view.

The only suggestion of Temple's that formed the basis of a new law was the one relating to the restoration of the jurisdiction of revenue authorities over rent disputes. The new law—The Agrarian Disputes Act (1876)—was intended to be an exceptional one, and in fact it was removed from the statute book before any use was made of it. His scheme regarding the enhancement of rent was found entirely unrealistic by almost all the Government officers. So far as Bengal was concerned the so-called competitive rent was a pure myth. The Commissioner of the Presidency Division expressed more or less a representative opinion: 'the notion of competitive rate of rent has even yet obtained no footing in the rural economy of Bengal. . . . near the Presidency there is perhaps some little competition for land, but even this is local rather than general . . . . It is not fact what we understand by free competition at all; that is to say, it is not a competition of capital and skill determined by profits ..... rent in such cases is merely the result of the relation of the numbers who want the land on the one side to the quantity of land on the other, and the numbers who want the land are not determined by the considera-



tions of the profits it gives to capital, but by the necessity of subsistence. <sup>170</sup> The question of the summary law was taken up by the next administration.

Temple's approach was fundamentally different from Campbell's. The point of departure of Campbell was a better protection of peasants' rights. Temple's scheme primarily emphasised the need for preservation and, at the same time, better definition of zamindars' interests and rights. After Eden took over, the emphasis shifted further towards the point of view of zamindars. He entirely ignored the role of zamindars in the prevailing agrarian tension, and believed that the 'primary want' in Bengal was a summary law of the kind proposed by Temple, since rents were withheld 'either for the sake of delay, or in pursuance of some organised system of opposition to the zamindar'. He was partly responsible for popularising the misleading generalisation—quite a commonplace in the official reports of the time—that it was Bihar peasants who needed legal protection, but not the Bengal peasants since they were far 'stronger' than zamindars. Eden, however, did not pass the summary law. 'The Government of India did not agree to one of the fundamental principles of the proposed law—free alienation of peasants' holdings. Apart from this it was felt that a just measure as it would have been, it might eventually adversely affect the established rights of peasants. Government found it 'almost impossible to frame a procedure which shall be perfectly fair to both parties, and yet afford such special facilities to the zamindar as he seeks to secure'. <sup>171</sup>

The Rent Bill drafted by the Rent Commission (1880) was a landmark in the history of rent legislation. After 1859 it was the first official attempt at a reconstruction of the whole rent law with a strong emphasis on the need to protect the rights of peasants and of a numerous intermediate group. It thus reversed the trend of the administration of Temple and Eden. The new attitude remained essentially unchanged, at least till 1885. How do we explain this new trend?

The administrative experience in Bihar, particularly during and after the famine of 1873-74, had a role in this. Government officers came to know that the famine was not a result of crop failure alone. It seemed a paradox to Geddes, who was investigating how the famine had affected Darbhanga, that in spite of a fertile soil peasants 'should not tide vicissitude by falling back on food reserves or on money resource'. To him the answer was the particular tenure under which peasants held and cultivated land. 'The whole conditions of agricultural industry are such as to render it precarious. There is no sufficient certainty as to tenure. It is impossible for the population to fall back this year solely on accumulated reserve, whether of grain, of property, of money, or of credit. For the whole conditions of life are such as to preclude any sufficient accumulation of the kind. The ryot cannot fall back on any credit fund. . . . like the tenant right of other parts of Bengal, for practically there is no such right available to offer in pledge. . .'. <sup>172</sup> This was by no





means an exceptional opinion. Very many officers thought alike. Such a conclusion was confirmed by the findings of the official investigation into the indigo question, and Government concluded that the root of the indigo question was the existing landlord-tenant relationship where peasants' rights in land have been very nearly extinguished. The *Report of the Indian Famine Commission 1880*) reaffirmed the same conclusion. The generalisation that 'as a rule, the cultivators with occupancy rights are better off than the tenants-at-will' was not, however, confined to Bihar alone. The Commission believed it was true everywhere in Bengal and Bihar. What was strikingly original in the *Report* was the idea that 'the condition of the rent law and the way in which it is administered in Bengal are a very grave hindrance to its agricultural prosperity, and that large portions of the agricultural population remain, mainly owing to this cause, in a state of poverty at all times dangerously near to actual starvation, and unable to resist the additional strain of famine'.<sup>173</sup> Everybody knew of the imperfections of the rent law, but none had so far blamed the destitution of people on them. Equally forceful was the argument of the Commission that for Government to abstain any longer from intervention to regulate the relations between zamindars and peasants would be a desertion of its responsibility. In a country where most people lived on agriculture it was 'impossible for the state, as the guardian of the common interests of the community, to leave the mutual relations of the payers and receivers of rent to adjust themselves by competition and the ordinary rules which govern commercial contracts'.<sup>174</sup> Recurrence of famines in the recent years had deeply perturbed Government, and such an analysis of their origin emphasising a necessary relation between the institution of land tenure and rent law on the one hand and poverty of the masses of people on the other had a deep impact on Government thinking about the whole rent question. It is very probable that the contemporary Irish agrarian question also influenced such thinking. With the big agricultural slump in the late seventies—largely a result of the increasing importation of the cheap prairie wheat into Europe—which was aggravated by many other circumstances, like the world monetary depression, outbreak of liver rot in sheep in 1879 etc. the Irish situation fast deteriorated. Large scale evictions followed failure of peasants to pay their rent because of falling agricultural prices. Peasants fought back by violent means. 'The whole fabric of society was shaken'.<sup>175</sup> The Act of 1881 quickly followed as an attempt at pacifying the country. The Bengal zamindars believed that 'the intense agitation in the United Kingdom on these questions (questions relating to Ireland) may have largely influenced, if not actually originated the changed policy' of Government regarding the rent question.<sup>176</sup> The Rent Law Commission did not mention the Irish situation, but discussions in the Viceroy's Council referred to it several times. There is no evidence to show that Government apprehended a peasants' revolt of the Irish type in Bengal. But Government felt very much uneasy over the whole agrarian situation in Bengal, and the



fact that Government could not foresee or predict what would happen tended to heighten this uneasiness. Cunningham, member of the Famine Commission, thus writes of his reactions: 'the grave political and social dangers, to which an impoverished, degraded, and rackrented peasantry gives rise, are assuming everywhere a more menacing aspect. . . . Official evidence of the weightiest character. . . makes it impossible to doubt that the condition of the peasantry in several parts of India is a peril to society'. . . .<sup>177</sup> Rivers Thompson's version of the unambitious rent legislation of 1859 as an attempt to avert an imminent 'agrarian revolution' serves to emphasise his deep anxiety over the agrarian situation he had to tackle. The fervour in Ilbert's defence of the Rent Bill in the Viceroy's Council derives from a sense of emergency: 'We are responsible for the introduction into this country of forces which threaten to revolutionise and disintegrate its social and economic system; we can not fold our hands and let them work in accordance with nature's blind laws. . . We must, to the best of our ability, endeavour to regulate and control their operations'.<sup>178</sup> It would not be wrong to conclude that the critical turn in the Irish situation had a role in creating such a pervasive sense of emergency. The influence of the Irish question on the original draft of the Bill is unmistakable. The phrase three F's was often used in the official reports to describe the main changes contemplated by the Rent Bill. Compensation for disturbance, which was an important provision of the Draft Bill of the Rent Commission, was entirely a new concept in Bengal. The uncommon emphasis on eviction is explainable only by the Irish influence. Eviction of peasants was a rare thing in Bengal, except where indigo planters were zamindars or farmers.

The Rent Bill as it was ultimately passed was much less favourable to peasants than the earlier drafts of the Bill. Yet, from the point of view of peasants, it was a considerable improvement on the Rent Act of 1859. The acquisition of occupancy rights was a much easier process now. A peasant could qualify by cultivating for 12 years any plot of land in a given village. It was no longer necessary to continue cultivating the same plot of land. Zamindars, particularly in Bihar, sometimes changed plots of land every five or six years to prevent their peasants from acquiring occupancy right. Moreover, unlike the Act of 1859, the new Act did not allow peasants to contract themselves out of such a right. The Act deprived zamindars of their old power of ejecting peasants for arrears of rent alone. The sale of an occupancy ryot's holding in execution of a decree for the rent was, however, permissible. As for the question of rent, the Act did not reduce the present quantum anywhere. There was no change either in the three main grounds of enhancement of the old Act. A significant change in procedure was the provision that Government would be responsible for the preparation of the price-list necessary for deciding enhancement-suits brought by zamindars on ground of an increase in the value of produce. Moreover, rent could be enhanced only once in a period of fifteen years. The quantum of enhancement would not be



more than 12·5% of the existing rent. There was not much change in the incidence of occupancy rights. Unlike the earlier Bills, the final Bill did not provide for the free alienation of holdings. But where such alienations had been an established custom the civil courts would not interfere with them. A significant provision of the Act was the authority it gave Government to prepare a Record of Rights on the basis of survey even in the zamindari estates. Suggestions for such a survey on earlier occasions were rejected on the ground that it would be tantamount to an interference with the the management of these estates. All these provisions applied only to the class of occupancy ryots. The non-occupancy ryots and the undertenants of occupancy ryots were entirely unprotected.

The measures of Government to rehabilitate tenant right were based on two assumptions. The first was a faith in the capacity of small peasants, in this case a select group of occupancy ryots, to evolve the most efficient organisation of production, given a security of tenure and a reasonably moderate rent. Secondly, there was almost a mystical belief in the capacity of law to do anything that Government wanted. What has been lost would be restored by law, and the threat from new changes to whatever remained would also be counteracted by law. Government realised the magnitude of the changes, but did not doubt the practicability of the attempt to bridge the gulf between the old world and the new. The idea was to control these changes. In Bengal, as Ilbert formulated it, 'the past and the present, old things and new, (have been) brought into sudden and violent contact with each other. . . . We cannot arrest this process of change. . . . All we can do is to endeavour by such means as are at our disposal to guide it in the new direction; to ease off the abruptness of the transition from the old to the new'. . .<sup>179</sup> The first assumption was only partially valid. Government over-emphasised the role of rent enhancement in the impoverishment of peasants, and entirely ignored the whole production process, the whole complex of rural credit, the resultant control of the credit agency over the land and produce of peasants and how all these reacted on the production process. As for the second assumption, the law effected changes, of course, not by bridging the gulf between the old world and the new, but by widening it.

### STRUCTURE OF LANDED PROPERTY

The previous sections have primarily emphasised how peasant producers had been affected by developments in our period. The present section deals with the structure of the community of landed proprietors and the following one with the interrelationship of some particular sections of the peasantry.

Landed proprietors became more and more a closed community, admitting new members much less frequently than before. This can largely be attributed to the rarity of auction sales of land which wiped out very many zamindari families after the Permanent Settlement. Analys-



ing the statistics of land sale in the period 1863-1873, the Bengal Board of Revenue observed: 'The average number of estates on the revenue roll was 219,408; the average number of annual sales of whole estates has been 686, giving an average annual proportion of sales to estates of '312 only'.<sup>180</sup> The total revenue of the permanently settled estates was nearly Rs. 365 lacs. In the period 1872-73 to 1885-86 it was only in 1881-82 that the revenue of the estates sold exceeded Rs. 2 lacs. If Chittagong is left out, the number of sales would be negligible. In view of the multitude of petty estates (nearly 72,000) sale laws were more rigorously enforced in Chittagong than elsewhere. The Collector of the district thus comments on the attitude of its zamindars towards sale: 'A permanently settled estate in Chittagong is not like a zamindari elsewhere, the sale of which ruins its owner. Here one man owns perhaps a dozen petty estates and shares and also a number of tenures. His object is to get his land compact, and to do this he sells one piece not conveniently situated and buys another. He is in fact like a man holding a hand at a game of cards, and lets go one of his *mehals* (estates) that he may improve his hand by taking up another'.<sup>181</sup> Most of Divisional Commissioners explained the rarity of sales by the increasing value of landed property in Bengal and the consequent reluctance of zamindars to part with their estates. The Commissioner of the Presidency Division observed in October 1871: 'It hardly ever occurs that even the most needy and improvident of landholders cannot command sufficient credit in the market to raise money sufficient to pay off his quarterly *kist* (instalment)'.<sup>181a</sup> The apprehension that the road cess and public works cess would depreciate the market value of landed property by destroying the people's 'confidence in the stability and permanence of Government demands' soon died away. The Bengal Board of Revenue concluded in 1878: 'Land is still the most coveted investment in the country and capitalists are willing to take less than half the interest they would demand for loans on good security, as a return for investment in land'.<sup>182</sup>

Estates were also sold privately by registered deeds of sale. The market for them was, however, restricted. Private sales could not attract as many buyers as auction sales. Purchasers generally preferred to buy land at auction, because its association with Government created an almost inviolable title. Yet the statistics compiled by the Registration Department of the Government of Bengal show that the number of private sales was not small.<sup>183</sup> Estates were classified under five groups: 1. entire revenue paying estates; 2. shares in these estates; 3. revenue free properties; 4. intermediate tenures and 5. interests intermediate between tenures and rights of occupancy or holdings at fixed rates. To what extent did persons alien to the landholding community purchase these estates? The method of classifying purchasers in the Registration Reports is far from satisfactory, and it is sometimes frustrating to attempt any meaningful statistical analysis. For instance, a large number of purchasers is simply classified as 'others'—the proper identification of which is any-



body's guess. Paul, Inspector General of Registration, suggested that the group referred to '*muktars*, pleaders and the general public other than *mehazuuns*'.<sup>184</sup> Bourdillon who held the same office agreed with this view : 'The 'others' are most probably members of the rising class of native advocates, pleaders, judges, magistrates, doctors etc. who, it is believed, have a great predilection for this class of property as a medium of safe investment for their savings'.<sup>185</sup> This view is acceptable, though it is quite likely that the group included not a few agents of zamindars who had some powerful motives for concealing their transactions. Again, opinions widely varied as to the identification of the group '*mehazuuns*'. Did moneylending (which is the literal meaning of *mahajani*) emerge as a distinct profession or was it only one of the supplementary sources of income of petty proprietors or of substantial peasants? Anyway, that the group included a number of petty proprietors would not be an unwarrantable supposition.

The group 'others' figures quite prominently in the statistics as purchasers of entire revenue paying estates. One gets the impression that the members of the professional groups bought these quite often. But a districtwise analysis of the statistics sufficiently refutes any such surmise. The purchases of these estates by this group were almost entirely confined to the districts of Calcutta (including a part of the 24-Parganas) and Chittagong.<sup>186</sup> For the rest of Bengal such purchases by professional groups were insignificant. The purchases in Calcutta by these groups and other occupational groups (deriving their income mainly from sources other than land) are explicable. In Chittagong most members of this group belonged either to the elaborate revenue establishment necessary for detailed settlement work in a district abounding with petty estates or to the zamindari bureaucracy. In all other districts zamindars of various ranks mostly purchased these estates. The peasant group which, much to our surprise, appears as purchasers of these estates almost entirely belongs to Chittagong, where the line of distinction between proprietors and substantial peasants was hard to draw.<sup>187</sup>

Zamindars and tenureholders between them purchased most of the shares in the entire revenue paying estates. The market in revenue free properties was dominated by the peasant group. In 1885-86, as purchasers of these properties, the number of ryots (10,089) exceeded the number of zamindars, tenureholders and *mahajans* put together (9008). Zamindars purchased these only rarely (2,076 out of a total of 28,807). Here the group 'others' put up a much better show than in other cases. From the respectable amount of the aggregate purchase-money fetched by sales of these properties, we can assume that the number of these holdings sold must have been considerable. This is an indication of the economic distress of this group of petty holders. The *Amrila Bazar Patrika* depicts the gradual extinction of this once important social group. These properties were notoriously ill-managed. The rising prices hit it as hard



as any other fixed income group. The constant threat of resumption by zamindars in some cases only tended to aggravate its difficulties.

Of the purchasers of intermediate tenures, tenureholders themselves were by far the largest group, as statistics of any one year would show. The insignificance of purchases by zamindars and *mahajans* is further evidence of the extremely narrow market of the privately sold lands. With all his superior resources the zamindar could scarcely penetrate the field dominated by tenureholders.

The group 'others' was most prominent as purchasers of interests intermediate between tenures and rights of occupancy or holdings at fixed rates.

The picture that emerges was clearly summed up by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal: 'The zamindars were the principal purchasers in the case of entire revenue paying estates and shares in such estates; ryots and 'others' in the case of revenue free properties; and principally tenureholders, but also to a great extent, ryots in the case of intermediate tenures'.<sup>188</sup>

The sale of permanent tenures like *Patnis* in Burdwan created a form of land market. I have statistics of *Patni* sales only for three years.<sup>189</sup> No valid conclusion can be drawn from statistics of such a limited period, but they are valuable in that they show a trend. In the Burdwan zamindari the number of *Patni* and other permanent tenures was 2519. The number of sales in the years 1881-83 was only 36, 29 and 46 respectively.

The existing revenue laws authorised an auction purchaser to cancel all the undertenures and to resettle them as he liked. The sale of estates free of encumbrances was an essential condition of a free market in land. This resettlement constituted a regional land market. But in our period even this market was extremely restricted. With the decreasing number of auction sales the scope for such a resettlement was narrowing. This was rare even where sales occurred. The findings of the official enquiry into the question in 1872-73<sup>190</sup> and 1888<sup>191</sup> established this point beyond any doubt. The enquiry of 1872-73 could detect only four cases of resettlement. Two explanations were offered for this forbearance on the part of auction-purchasers. First, they thought it indiscreet to antagonise the large body of undertenureholders. Their rashness would only produce a crop of litigation, far too much for them to cope with. The Burdwan Commissioner suggested the second explanation: 'The cause is the same which leads to so much subinfeudation—the feeling of security and ease entailed by having good substantial men between the head landlord and the actual cultivators of the soil'.<sup>192</sup> This forbearance of the auction purchasers partly explains why the undertenureholders took very little advantage of an Act of 1859 by which they could avoid being eliminated by registering their tenures. Out of 261893 tenures assessed with road cess in Bakarganj only 72 tenures were registered. The Board of Revenue concluded that 'out of every 100 tenures which the Act was designed to protect, 99 remain unprotected'.



The land market created by the sale of waste lands also remained restricted. Before the sale of waste lands became a vital question for Government in the late fifties of the 19th century, it sold patches of these lands in the Sunderbuns to persons of modest resources interested in reclamation and in Darjeeling to tea planters. The motives of Government for the sales in the Sunderbuns was to fight some diseases at their root in order to keep the neighbouring districts free from them. As for Darjeeling, Government was not yet convinced of the possibility of growth of the infant tea industry. Two circumstances provided a stimulus to the move for selling the waste lands. First, the Mutiny encouraged a policy of securing the loyalties of new groups to strengthen the foundation of Government. In this context the effectiveness of European settlements was mooted, and Government was encouraged in this by the eagerness of the European capitalists to invest their capital in India.<sup>193</sup> This new enterprise was not conceived as a mere migration of capital and technological skill to be utilised in the industrial sector of India's economy. It would be an agricultural enterprise, with physical settlements of Europeans if possible. Such settlements were possible only in the waste lands. Secondly, the American Civil war which resulted in the virtual cessation of the supply of American cotton to England revived the old idea of growing cotton in India in order to minimise dependence on America. The waste lands could now be utilised for this.

The policy of selling the waste lands had only a small success. Contrary to expectations, the fund of waste lands fit to be used by Europeans argued that the Sonthals used the waste lands as grazing ground. They turned out to be small. The waste lands in the Government estates, already given in lease to farmers, were naturally excluded. So were the extensive alluvial formations, since other revenue laws regulated their settlement. A much more effective constraint on the land market was the conservative policy of Government. The meticulous care taken for protecting the faintest traces of the right of property or occupancy in the soil tended to unusually limit the quantity of disposable land. Government would encourage the new enterprise only to the extent it did not clash with these rights, whatever the stage and degree of their development. The exclusion of Damin-i-Koh in the Sonthal Parganas from the disposable waste lands may be taken as an illustration of the official attitude regarding these rights. Damin-i-Koh was inhabited by two distinct groups—Sonthals and Paharias. The Commissioner of the Sonthal Parganas had as much right to these lands as to those reclaimed by them. The sale of the waste lands would be thus an invasion on their rights. As for the Paharias, this sale would totally dislocate their economy, organised in a particular way. They cultivated only small patches of land, and without a settled agriculture, they still retained their nomadic habits. 'He will fish or hunt or roam over miles of the forest, searching for honeycombs, wild yams and other edible roots'. The sale of waste lands would cut them adrift from their sources of subsistence. The Government of India



was convinced by these arguments. Apart from this conservation, some of the rules regulating the sale of waste lands were obnoxious to Europeans. One such rule till 1861 was the obligation to complete the reclamation of a specified area of land within a given time. The European capitalist argued that to risk forfeiture of a part of their lands for failure to fulfil this obligation made raising loans in the London market extremely difficult. Other objectionable rules were the competitive sale and high price of land. The policy on these questions reflected a dominant trend in the Government thinking. Government had to choose between two alternatives: 1. economic prosperity through the introduction of British capital and enterprise and the cultivation of new crops under it, for which waste lands would be sold on easy terms; 2. economic prosperity by stabilising the existing revenue system and by utilising the waste lands primarily as a source of revenue. The Government of India decided in favour of the second. Lawrence's Minute of 5 July 1862 was a defence of this point of view. He was writing under the shadow of a deepening economic stringency. The 'introduction of the European principles of taxation' to help the problem towards a solution had only a small success. Yet, as a consequence, it 'unsettled the minds of the people'. To part with these waste lands at a small price would be in this context a folly. The waste lands, unimportant at the time from the point of view of revenue, would in no time be reclaimed with gradual improvement in communication. His basic assumption was thus explained: 'In a country like India where the public necessities require that a large revenue should be annually raised, any arrangement which gives an undue advantage to the acquisition of landed property free of assessment is unjust to the rest of the community'. He was not unaware of the advantages the country would derive from European enterprise; 'but all these advantages ought to be secondary to the policy of taxing the people of India generally as low as possible'.

That such a policy was ultimately self-defeating was proved in the Sunderbuns. The Board of Revenue wrote of the 'complete failure' of the policy of sale there. Two grandiose schemes of reclamation proposed by Messrs Borradaile, Schiller and Co and Land Investment and Dock Company fell through. That the quantity of land taken up by the tea planters in Cachar, Chittagong, Sylhet, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri was bigger is largely explained by the compelling need of a growing industry for land.

The statistics compiled by the Registration Department of the Government of Bengal show the growth of a class of petty proprietors who purchased the alienated holdings of peasants and let out the same lands to almost invariably the same group of peasants on a share-cropping basis. The statistics<sup>194</sup> show that substantial peasants, the group 'others' and moneylenders were the purchasers in most cases. In Bihar in not a few cases the indigo planters were the purchasers.

The scope for the investment of private fortunes in the purchase of



land was thus extremely limited. Auction sales affected only a small number of estates, and similarly small was the number of privately sold estates, the revenue of which seldom exceeded Rs. 1.75 lacs. (The number of *unregistered* sales is unknown, and it is useless arguing from the assumption that the number was considerable). On the other hand, whatever the reasons, the purchase of land was still considered the most desirable form of investment. The result was a greater keenness of demand for land and the resultant rise in the market value of land, thus excluding persons of modest resources from the land market. The economic and social consequences of the extremely restricted scope of the most desirable investment are worth investigation. One consequence was that a larger number of petty proprietors found moneylending the safest and the most profitable mode of investment under the circumstances. The increasing number of joint stock bodies or societies whose main function was to lend money on the security of landed property was a similar development.

The structure of ownership of landed property had some particular features. One was the absence of concentration of land in few hands. Of the 110,456 estates in Bengal and Bihar, 97,695 were under 500 acres, 12,304 from 500 to 20,000 acres and 457 estates above 20,000 acres. Thus only a tiny .04% were large estates of over 20,000 acres; 11% ranged from 500 to 20,000 acres, and nearly 88.5% were petty estates of less than 500 acres. Except in some eastern Bengal and Bihar districts the number of proprietors holding more than one estate was not big. The days of large estates were gone. In the period under review horizontal subdivision of property was fast increasing, particularly in the Bihar districts. The co-sharing system, a significant feature of landed property in Bihar, was gradually breaking down. Its weakness as a system of management was exposed when it came into contact with the rigid revenue system of Government. Another solvent of this traditional system was the increasing value of landed property which created in the individual shareholders an urge to break out of the communal fold and utilise their share in the property as best as they could. A cumbrous system in itself, it found itself more and more vulnerable to the increasing tensions in the agrarian society produced by the indigo system. The Collector of Muzaffarpur explained in 1877 the role of this system in dissolving the co-parcenary system: 'A *malik* in a joint undivided estate, who is on bad terms with his co-sharers or in want of money gives a lease of his share to a factory; the manager ignores the customs under which the co-sharers have managed their property and proceeds to carve out for himself *zarat* lands here and there. The injured co-sharers, finding themselves unable to resist the factory in the civil courts have recourse to a partition case'.<sup>193</sup>

The structure of ownership was also affected by a vertical sub-division of property. It had two main forms—one in the regions of settled cultivation, and another in those of a relatively new cultivation. The *Palni* tenures of Burdwan and other districts were a type of the first form. Paradoxically enough, though owner of extensive estates, the Burdwan



zamindar had no power to direct their management. The *patnidars* were the virtual owners as long as they paid rent. The Burdwan zamindary, the largest one in Bengal, comprising 25,99,273 acres was divided into 3117 lots, of which 2519 were let out in *patni* leases (more than 81% of the whole), 57 under conditional leases and 38 under temporary leases. Only 503 lots were directly managed. This reservation was not due to any taste for personal management. They were unremunerative and hence relinquished by the *patnidars*. We have no accurate statistics of *patni* leases of other estates of Bengal, but there is no doubt about the wide use of this institution by zamindars. The second form prevailed in the districts where the cultivation of virgin soil was an essential feature of the agrarian economy. The *howaladary* tenures in the eastern districts of Bengal may be taken as a type. Zamindars created these tenures to encourage reclamation of waste. The *howaladars*, whom Richard Temple called 'agricultural capitalists' were the moving force behind the whole process of reclamation. They persuaded peasants to settle on these lands, provided them with capital, resisted encroachment by other adventurers and in fact did everything necessary for the growth and security of the new agricultural colonies. The *howaladary* tenures, however, did not retain this character throughout. In many places the original holders disappeared, giving place to simple speculators. In some cases where cultivation had reached a certain point, the original holders created their own tenures. The Sunderbuns Commissioner's description of new *howalas* shows the shift of emphasis from the sheer economic calculations of an entrepreneur to considerations of social respectability: 'The *howaladars* take no active part in reclamation, except perhaps during the first year or two in felling the jungle; in all other parts they are influential middlemen. . . . What the people desire in seeking for *howalas* is the social status it gives them. . . . The motive is much the same as urges a well-to-do native to purchase a zamindari—for, having no other species of rank, the desire of distinction seeks expression in this way'.<sup>196</sup>

These agricultural entrepreneurs were known by different names in other districts—*jotedars* in Rangpur, *grantidars* in Jessore, *aymadars* and *mandals* in Midnapur etc. The following statistics show the wide extent of the development of tenureholding in Bengal. In 1874 the Road cess valuations revealed that out of the aggregate valuation for 16 districts amounting to Rs. 4,72,13,324, Rs. 3, 14, 90, 811 were due from 304,656 tenures in 80,951 estates. Thus the tenures would pay a full 66% of the entire valuation. The tenures were most numerous in the district of Bakarganj.

It would be wrong to assume an absence of mobility within this group of proprietors possessing different degrees of property right. A tenureholder of the first degree or even a superior zamindar could hold undertenures of second, third or fourth degree. This suggests a certain frequency of change of ownership from one group to another. When land utilisation had reached a very high point and the value of landed property



tended to increase, it did not hurt the pride of a zamindar to hold under another zamindar.

An important incident of the right of tenureholding was its heritability and transferability. Zamindars, however, reserved the right to enhance rent. Much depended on the relative strength of the parties. In Bakarganj and some other districts the *howaladars* successfully fought back any move to enhance their rents. In Jessore the *grantidars* fared much worse. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* deplored the declining income of the group. Failing to earn a decent living from land, the group intended to take to purely middle class occupations, but here too the field was overcrowded. The journal believed that the decadence of the group, 'the pith and marrow', the 'backbone of the society', would produce a certain imbalance in society.

A significant development in the period under review having a bearing on the question of vertical subdivision of property was an immense increase in the number of perpetual leases.<sup>197</sup> The phenomenon was largely confined to seven districts: Chittagang, Bakarganj, Jessore, Noakhali, Faridpur, 24-Parganas and Khulna. The leaseholder, on first getting the lease, paid zamindars a lump sum (*salami*), but ever afterwards paid a fixed rent. Of the leaseholders substantial peasants formed a sizable group. This development, hailed by George Campbell as the welcome sign of 'diffusion of landed property' and deplored by Richard Temple as the unmistakable sign of transference of actual ownership from old families and of increasing subinfeudation in the country, owed its origin to various circumstances. These leases admirably suited some particular kinds of cultivation, particularly the cultivation of betelnut, cocoanut and date palm. All these plants took years before they bore fruit, and had a longer life than most others. 'Hence a permanent tenure of the land which is to become so valuable a property is of first importance to the cultivator'. A more important reason was the growing tension in agrarian relations. Facing an increasing difficulty in the collection of rent as a result of this tension, some zamindars granted perpetual leases to energetic middlemen willing to take the onerous responsibility of estate management. In districts like Chittagong the scattered nature of estates presented a strong case for this delegation of responsibility. This eagerness of zamindars was sharpened, as the Collector of Noakhali observed in 1875, by the increasingly hostile public opinion against the Permanent Settlement. He wrote: 'The road cess and kindred questions were first agitated, which further unsettled the minds of the landholders. Proprietary rights in land appear to have then undergone a temporary depreciation in the public mind while those discussions were going on, just as in England the agitation about the corn laws caused a temporary depreciation of the value of real property in land'. The discussions over the Bengal Tenancy Bill retarded the development in some districts, but stimulated it in others. An immediate reaction of zamindars to the Bill, particularly where they felt confident of their position, was a reluctance to bind their hands by



these legal documents. In other regions where zamindars were weak, the perpetual leases were nervous half-measures to save as much as possible before the calamity finally engulfed them. The large increase in the number of these leases in Rangpur on the eve of the Bengal Tenancy Act was attributed by the Registrar of Rangpur 'to the efforts of the zamindars to realise a partial value of their zamindari at the present market rate before it is reduced by the proposed legislation'.<sup>198</sup> The passing of the Act had a chastening effect on zamindars, and the perpetual leases were partly the product of their distrust in the efficiency of their scheme of wearing out the peasants by rent-suits. The Registrar of 24-Parganas interpreted the increase in the number of these leases as 'evidence of the landlords having generally accepted the position in which the Act has placed them in relation to their settled ryots. They find it is useless to prevent the acquisition of permanent rights by occupancy ryots, and that it is more to their advantage to secure payment of a certain rent fixed in perpetuity. . . . than to trust to the chance of irregular enhancements, with the risk of their last state becoming worse than the first'.<sup>199</sup>

#### SOME OBSERVATIONS ON SOME PARTICULAR SECTIONS OF THE PEASANTRY

I have not attempted in this section to stratify the peasantry on the basis of difference in economic position of different groups. Relevant statistics for such a study are wanting for most districts of Bengal. Government officers attempted such a study in some districts, but the area covered by it is so small that no safe conclusion can be drawn from it which is valid for the whole of Bengal. Yet it is better to use the statistics of this very limited coverage rather than make some impressionistic observations. District officers did not all follow any one consistent principle for this stratification. The most common one was the size of the farm. The number of ploughs owned by peasants was another—a principle widely used for similar studies by historians of agrarian economy of western Europe.<sup>200</sup> It was, however, rarely used by district officers, though they understood its importance in the particular agrarian setting of Bengal. Rum Sunker Sen observes in his *Report on the agricultural statistics of Jhenidah, Magurah, Bagirhat and Sunderbuns Sub-divisions*: 'In a country where so much depends on the stock the ryot is able to provide himself with, the size of his farm is in proportion to the means he possesses for keeping the same under cultivation, and is limited according to the extent of those means'.<sup>201</sup> The Commissioner of the Presidency Division writes: 'The distinction between small cultivators and labourers lies in this, that a man who has a plough and oxen is called a *chasa* or cultivator, and he that has no plough or oxen for tilling his small holding is known as a *majoor* or labourer'.<sup>202</sup> He concludes: 'The prosperity of a family appears to be regulated by the number of ploughs it can afford to keep in work'. The Collector of Nadia stratified the



peasantry of some villages in the district on this principle.<sup>203</sup> Out of 40 peasant families in a village, 25 had one plough, 8 had two, 2 had three, 3 had four, one family only had five and one family had no plough. In another village out of 77 families of peasants, 63 families had one plough each and 14 families had two. The family having five ploughs cultivated 100 *bigahs* of land. The holdings of families having only one plough, which constituted 62·5% and 68% of the total peasant families in the two villages respectively, seldom exceeded 10 or 12 *bigahs*. Their land, as the Collector found, was 'generally held on the *burga* (share-cropping) system'. He thus observes on the general economic position of these families: 'Families of six persons and over with one plough and 10 or 12 *bigahs* are generally indebted and have to pay from 25 to 37½ per cent. interest for advances'. The stratification of the peasantry by district officers on the principle of the size of farm reveals a pattern which is more or less the same throughout Bengal: most of the peasants belonged to a group whose holdings were very small and only a minority of peasant families had large holdings. (The degree of smallness and largeness varied, of course, in different districts, and we do not intend to make any inter-district comparison.) Out of 798 peasant families in 'nine large villages situated in different parts' of the district of Jessore, 155 had holdings of 10 *bigahs* or more, 232 had less than 10 *bigahs*, 365 had two *bigahs*, and most of the rest had no land at all.<sup>204</sup> Peasants of the first group (19·4% of the total peasant families) 'generally have under-tenants and others in various degrees of dependence on them, and where they have date tree cultivation, they are extremely well off..... These men are certainly not as a rule in debt, but are often moneylenders'. This group 'comprises the numerous *lakirajdars* (holders of rent-free land), who are mostly Hindus of good caste, and still more numerous *gantidars*, who are of all castes and many are Mohamedans'. The Collector did not identify the caste of the second group which, according to him, 'represents the poor respectables of the agricultural world'. The third group 'includes all the low caste people, such as *moochies*'. 891 holdings in the Syedpur Trust Estate in the north of the district of Khulna were classified by the Collector in the following way: 673 of 10 *bigahs* and under, 102 of from 10 to 20 *bigahs*, 43 of from 20 to 30 *bigahs*, 25 of from 30 to 40 *bigahs*, 7 of from 40 to 50 *bigahs* and 41 of more than 50 *bigahs*. The fact that in the south of the district the holdings were much less uneven was due to the recentness and the nature of the reclamation of waste there. The road cess statistics of a village in the Sadar subdivision of Rajshahi show that 6·3% of the peasant population held more than 20 *bigahs* of land, 23% from 10 to 20 *bigahs*, 14·3% from 5 to 10 *bigahs*, and 56·6% only 5 *bigahs*.<sup>205</sup> Of the 126 families in the village Bhita, 'typical in many respects of the others', in the district of Midnapur, 70 cultivated from 1 to 2 *bigahs*, 23 from 2 to 5 *bigahs*, 20 from 5 to 10 *bigahs*, and only 13 held more than 10 *bigahs*.<sup>206</sup> With a few exceptions the pattern was similar everywhere in Bengal.

The report of the Collector of Nadia suggests, as we have seen, a



correlation between a low caste and a low economic position of peasants. In Bihar, as we shall see later, a sizable section of agricultural labourers belonged to low castes. It is significant to note that as late as 1933 a survey team investigating the economic conditions of four villages near Sriniketan in the district of Birbhum also emphasised this correlation: 'When all this mass of data was taken up for analysis and the population classified into economic groups, it was found that such grouping on a purely economic basis corresponded remarkably closely with the social groupings according to caste and religion..... We do not have to ask a man's occupation; we have only to know his caste or religion and we know his economic position'.<sup>207</sup> It would be useful to investigate if this correspondence was universal in Bengal; if so, to analyse the mechanism of the process which resulted in this correspondence, and if not, to show how other forces succeeded in eroding the influences of caste. I am inclined to the view that such influences were ineffective against economic forces in very many parts of Bengal. The obstinate caste pride did not prevent the impoverishment of a large group of people of higher castes, while caste sanctions alone could not stifle individual enterprise, initiative and skill of members of lower castes. As an illustration of the latter we can refer to the Namasudra community of Faridpur. But the fact that despite a considerable improvement in their economic position the Namasudras did not ignore, let alone reject, the institution of caste and aspired to rise to superior castes was evidence that caste was a fundamental category of social thought at the time. The District Superintendent of Police, Faridpur thus comments on the "Chandal" (Namasudra) movement in the district in 1872-73: 'The strike (an attempt of the Chandals to stop social intercourse with all castes other than the Brahmins). . . . at present only meditates an attempt on their part to rise in social status; their industry, prudence, and general demand as agriculturists having placed them in competent circumstances, and several of them even in a state of affluence,..... an effort is being made to remove the stigma of reproach from their castes'.<sup>208</sup>

To me a study of the functional relationship of the different groups of peasants deriving from a particular process of production seems more significant than a mere stratification of the peasantry. The stratification is the first necessary step, but this alone does not show how it linked up with the functioning of the peasant economy at various levels. It is not enough, for instance, merely to conclude that, say, 70% of peasants had very small holdings and one pair of plough each and that 30% had much larger holdings and three ploughs each. It is necessary to investigate if the second group found it possible sometimes, in various ways, to use the land and labour of the first group for its own benefit. I shall try to analyse the nature of this relationship and mainly emphasise the relationship of the group we call 'rich peasants' with others classified under two groups—sub-ryots and agricultural labourers. The distinction between sub-ryots and agricultural labourers was not absolute. Some sub-ryots were none



but agricultural labourers, both in relation to the peasants of whom they hired out their labour. Yet agricultural labourers had some distinct characteristics and all of them were not sub-ryots.

Most of the studies of rural Bengal lay the entire emphasis on *mahajans* (moneylenders) and zamindars, and ignore the role that rich peasants played in the peasant economy. Such studies give the impression that *mahajans* formed a sharply differentiated class in rural Bengal and entirely miss the fact that rich peasants themselves were often the *mahajans*. The cultivation of some cash crops resulted, as we have seen, in the introduction of new credit groups. But market forces did not affect more than a small sector of the economy. Its predominant form was still the cultivation of land by small peasants for their subsistence. A part of the produce, in some cases quite a considerable one, found its way into the market, but it was in spite of peasants. The rich peasants, it is true, often dissociated themselves from agriculture and, even if such dissociation was not complete, they derived a much larger income from moneylending, graindealing etc. than from agriculture. But the relevant point is that *originally* they were peasants. Zamindars had a significant role to play. But they seldom participated in cultivation, and only a few of them (mostly the intermediate tenureholders) had demesne lands, which formed only a small part of the total cultivated area. Such a role was, however, limited by the very nature of agriculture itself—its unchanging technique, crop pattern, and, over a certain period, value of produce. The only exceptions occurred in the regions where indigo planters were zamindars or farmers. Where petty proprietors were also *mahajans*, their role was more important. Students of agrarian history of Bengal should now properly emphasise the role of the rich peasants.

It is rather difficult to explain why a certain number of peasants (the number was small, except in a few districts) grew much richer than others. It is easy to explain how moneylending, graindealing etc. constituted, *at a certain stage*, the foundation of this richness. But the question remains how they could accumulate enough wealth to be able to lend to others and invest in graindealing. Traditionally the *mandal* (village headman) community was richer than the common peasants, but the community was fast dying out. Certain castes enjoyed privileges in matters of rent, but these did not necessarily make for any superiority in their economic position. As early as the first decade of the 19th century Buchanan Hamilton noted how the land of such a privileged group like the *Ashraffs* of Bihar was much less skilfully cultivated than that of others. The relative richness was not a product either of any superior technique of cultivation. The agricultural techniques including the seeds and the breed of cattle were more or less the same in a given village or a cluster of villages. The origin of the richer peasantry is then to be largely attributed to some greater differential natural advantages like better soil, better facilities for irrigation, nearness to the market (where a market in certain produces had developed) etc. and to certain acquired (or inherent)



qualities of peasants like superior skill in agriculture, enterprise, readiness to take up reclamation of waste land and to cultivate richer crops, thrift etc. The general family background—the proportion of the number of able-bodied adult members employed in agriculture to the number of dependants in the extended family system—was also a cause of differences in the economic position of different groups of peasants. The developments in our period which affected this differentiation were the rapid improvement in the means of communication, widening market for some agricultural produces, the fast growth of the cultivation of jute crop, the faster pace of the reclamation of waste land as a consequence of an increase in population and in market prices of produces and many other things else besides.

What was the role of the surplus resources of the rich peasants in the peasant economy? It was only rarely that the rich peasants used them for improving their land. A usual practice was to sublet their land to their poorer brethren. It was the conviction about the universal propensity of the rich peasants to sublet their land which led a number of Government officers to oppose the Rent Bill, particularly those sections of the Bill which sought to limit enhancement of rent. This limitation, they argued, would only strengthen the propensity. The view of Westmacott, Collector of Dacca, may be taken as the representative one: 'If rents are artificially kept below a certain point, they will introduce a non-cultivating class of tenureholders who will sublet to actual cultivators who agree to pay the market value of the use of land'.<sup>209</sup> This view was expressed in 1883. Westmacott stated his conviction more forcefully ten years later in 1893: 'The more valuable a holding is made in any way, by transferability of tenure, limitation or rents, the greater the tendency must be to sever the holder from the soil because he will generally cease to cultivate, and will sublet to others, as soon as the difference between the rent which he has to pay and the rent which the actual cultivator can afford to pay him, becomes sufficiently great to furnish subsistence to a middleman'.<sup>210</sup> We shall try later to account for this practice of subletting. A more common form of investment of the surplus resources was moneylending, which was not only the lending of liquid cash, but more often also of rice during the inter-harvest period. An official report on Jessore says: '*Dhan* (paddy)-lending is a very important trade in the Jhenidah sub-division..... Every ryot who has a little *dhan* sets up a *dhan* lender, and in this way one such trader may be found in almost every village. The *dhan* and moneylender to whom the ryot binds himself is termed *jater* and *pater mahajun*, i.e. guardian of his honour and supplier of his food'.<sup>211</sup> Another profitable mode of investment was to purchase the alienated holdings of other peasants and to sublet these again mostly to them on a share-cropping basis. Of the purchasers of these holdings, ryots were the most numerous group (vide foot note No. 194). The perennial ambition of a rich peasant, as contemporary evidence shows, was to acquire the status of a zamindar. 'The greatest ambition of a



salt, jute, or rice merchant (generally a *teli* or *shaha* by caste), after rising to influence by trade is to buy up a zamindari or estate.....; while that of a ryot, who has bought up some sub-tenure with permanent rights from the proceeds of his date crop or *dhan*-lending, is to be styled a *Joardar* or *Bhuian* by his neighbours'.<sup>212</sup>

The subletting of land by richer peasants and the consequent emergence of a group of sub-ryots indicate a significant change in the economic structure of rural Bengal: a process of dissociation from agriculture, though not always complete, of a section of peasants hitherto living by actively participating in cultivation, but henceforward living off rent from their sub-ryots. The statistics compiled by the Settlement officers at about the end of the 19th century give an impression that the sub-ryots were numerically an insignificant group. Nowhere do the statistics show them to be more than a mere 5% of the total peasant population. Such statistics are obviously unreliable. The Settlement officers were more concerned with the legal status of peasants than with the economic. Once a ryot was classified as an occupancy ryot they did not care to know whether the same ryot cultivated a part of another ryot's holdings. All non-statistical evidence shows that the sub-ryots were a far more numerous group.

The explanation of the phenomenon of subletting by district officers emphasised the sociological factors more than the purely economic ones. The Additional Judge of the 24 Parganas believed that the tendency towards sub-letting 'has been fostered by the apathetic or inert character of the people who prefer the ease and dignity attached in popular estimation to the position of a rent-receiver or *talookdar* to the large profits which might be realised from direct cultivation of soil'.<sup>213</sup> The District Judge of East Burdwan explains the phenomenon in very nearly the same words: 'The love of ease inherent in human nature makes this a very natural result in any country'.<sup>214</sup> The judge of Small Causes Court, Krishnagar puts it in a slightly different way: 'The great temptation of the lower class of the people as occupancy ryots and actual cultivators of soil is to elevate themselves and enter the higher rank which prevents them to touch and work ploughs'.<sup>215</sup> The Collector of Bakarganj explains it by the popular attitude to agricultural work. He wrote of the 'strong(ly) rooted aversion to the pursuit of agriculture: it is degrading to the persons employed in it and is generally regarded as the last means from which to earn a bare subsistence. The prohibition against the practice of agriculture has come to be recognised as a caste rule with classes whom circumstances at one time made independent of it. So it is natural to suppose that any improvement in the soil, any considerable rise in the value of produce..... or other circumstances which will improve the letting value of his holding will be eagerly availed of by the cultivating tenant to get rid of his hated life and rise to the enviable position of rent-receiving middlemen. In fact, the severance of his actual connection with land by subletting is an object dear to the heart of the Bengali ryot'.<sup>216</sup>



The aspiration for the social respectability of the rent-receiving group was undeniably a powerful motive with rich peasants in subletting their land. Purely economic considerations only strengthened this motive. It was generally agreed that the rich peasants derived a larger income from subletting their land than from a direct cultivation of their whole holdings by hired labour. The usual hazards of cultivation and the liability of the crops to fail in various ways further discouraged any attempt at direct cultivation. Where the rich peasants were the creditors of the sub-ryots, which in very many cases they were, the conditions of subletting were much more favourable to them than where the sub-ryots were not indebted to them. Moreover, the law did not protect the sub-ryots from enhancement of their rent by the superior ryots, and where the pressure of population was very high the latter fully exploited the advantage. The state of the law on the point was nowhere more anomalous than in the region where the rich peasants reclaimed large waste lands by subletting them all in blocks to other ryots. The leading ryots had long ceased to be cultivators and the sub-ryots had been continuously cultivating these lands for more than twelve years, yet the law recognised the non-cultivating middlemen as the occupancy ryots and left the whole community of real cultivators to their mercy.

Agricultural labourers were a distinct and sizable group in the peasant community. Grierson, Collector of Gaya, thus described the distinct feature of agricultural labour: those who 'live wholly or mainly by cultivating their own land' were called cultivators, and those who 'live wholly or mainly by cultivating other people's land' were called labourers. Floating landless labour was not a dominant characteristic feature of agricultural labour of Bengal, though a number of agricultural labourers were not cultivators, but merely assisted other cultivators during the sowing and the harvest seasons. This was even true of districts having the highest density of agricultural population like Saran. Tobin, Subdivisional Officer of Sewan, observed: 'If by landless labourer is meant a labourer who actually rented no land at all, and cultivated no crop with rental paid in kind, such labourers are most rare.'<sup>217</sup>

Agricultural labourers were a fairly numerous group. According to the Census of 1901, they were 17·5% of the agricultural population in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.<sup>218</sup> District reports based on sample survey of some select villages provide valuable information on this point. From a census of over 10,000 people in 1888 in Gaya, Grierson found that 23% were agricultural labourers. Nearly a decade later in his *Report on the material condition of small agriculturists and labourers in Gaya* Stevenson Moore estimated their number at 34·05% of the population.<sup>219</sup> In two subdivisions of Bhagalpur the number of agricultural labourers ranged from 26% to 36% and 26% to 46% respectively of the population of six villages selected in each sub-division for investigation in 1888.<sup>220</sup> According to a special census in Darbhanga in 1876, nearly 25% of the agricultural population were agricultural labourers.<sup>221</sup> In two villages in the Sadar sub-division



and the Basirhat sub-division of the district of 24-Parganas, agricultural labourers were nearly as numerous as cultivators. There were 145 families of the former, and 158 of the latter.<sup>222</sup> The average size of the cultivators' families was, however, larger. In a village in the north of the district of Nadia considered to be one of 'considerable prosperity', the number of cultivators' families was 44 and that of the labourers' 58. Of the former even, 50% held lands on the *burga* system. 'Practically they are', the Collector of Nadia reports, 'little better than labourers on the co-operative system.'<sup>223</sup> In 1888 agricultural labourers in the *Rarh* tract of Murshidabad were estimated at from 10% to 15% of the 'agriculturists' and those in the *Bagri* and *Kalantar* tract at 30%. Except in some northern districts like Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Rangpur in Bengal and Purnea in Bihar and some eastern districts like Bakarganj the size of agricultural labour was thus considerably big.

For our purpose a more significant question is: who employed the agricultural labourers. District reports did not often carefully specify who the 'masters', their employers, were. Some reports give an impression that zamindars employed them sometimes. According to the Collector of Darbhanga the difficulty in procuring labour for public works was partly 'due to the fact that the day labourer is so bound to the zamindar by habit and thought that he does not care to work away from his village'.<sup>224</sup> Grierson noted how the *kamiya* system was 'strongly upheld by the landlord classes'. In the cases relating to partition of estates 'the main quarrel is often over the *basti* (settlement of *kamiyas*) division; an aggrieved party often openly complains that the Deputy Collector has not given him his fair share of the *kamiyas*, as if they were liable to division like the other fixtures of the land'.<sup>225</sup> In 1855 the 'zemindars' of Mongyr complained to the Magistrate that the local agricultural labourers were deserting their estates to work for the 'railway officers', and persuaded him to issue an order to the railway authorities prohibiting their employment of the agricultural labourers against the will of zamindars.<sup>226</sup> The district reports, however, are not clear about the nature of the employment under the zamindars. The Mongyr zamindars complained that the desertion of agricultural labourers caused them a great deal of inconvenience, particularly when it took place at the sowing and ploughing seasons. Did these zamindars themselves organise cultivation by employing hired labour, or were they merely spokesmen for the substantial peasants under them who were hit by the desertion of the labourers? In view of the general unanimity among district officers that instances of direct cultivation by zamindars were rare, the second seems to me to be a more legitimate conclusion. Zamindars were eager to retain the *kamiyas* mostly for works other than agriculture.

By far the largest number of agricultural labourers were employed by certain sections of the peasantry. The mode and conditions of such employment of course varied, but we do not know how numerous the different groups of agricultural labourers were. Agricultural labour had



an exceptional feature in certain parts of Bihar. It constituted a predominant element in the organisation of cultivation when the superior peasants belonged to higher castes and were forbidden by caste rules to touch the plough. In some regions the agricultural labourers employed by them had two characteristic features: their concentration in one part of the village and low caste. The Deputy Magistrate of the Nowadah Subdivision writes to the Magistrate of Gaya: 'Any one sojourning in this subdivision will find hamlets with a cluster of huts attached to each village called *mosaharees* or *rujwarees* (the place where *musahars* and *rajwars* lived in). This hamlet invariably supplies the local agricultural labour'.<sup>227</sup> Is this concentration evidence that the whole community of these labourers were brought by the superior castes from other regions at the time of agricultural settlement in the village? District reports, however, do not explain the origin of the colonies of these labourers. But we are pretty sure that these *musahars* were all 'bondmen' of the peasants' superior castes. There is no doubt at the same time that caste coercion had an important role in the indissoluble 'attachment' of these labourers to their creditors. All the district officers testify to the extremely poor living conditions of 'these black, miserable descendants of aboriginal tribes'.<sup>228</sup> Their employers were powerful enough to prevent their emigration to other regions to look for better conditions of work. The Subdivisional officer of Sewan (in the district of Saran) writes: "possessors of a larger kind of farms, with area from 15 to 30 *bighas*, and even less, know the importance of preserving this class alive, . . . . and give them just enough food to keep body and soul together. . . . So long as there is a large class of middle class farmers whose caste or pride restrains them from working, and who are prepared to devote all their influence and much of their substance to keep the really poor in the district, so long will all schemes for diminishing the population by emigration infallibly fail".<sup>229</sup>

Agricultural labourers had emerged as a distinct group even where the particular circumstances described above were not present. The usual relation between an agricultural labourer and his employer was the one, in very many cases, between a debtor and his creditor. An agricultural labourer worked for another peasant mostly because the latter gave him cash advances or lent him plough or seed grains. A striking feature was the rarity of purely day labour, i.e. labour on a daily wage basis, even where the agricultural labourers were merely labourers assisting other peasants in the general work of cultivation without being responsible for whatever happened to the crop. The period of their employment was mostly one full agricultural season or a greater part of it. The *kamiya* system, widely prevalent in Bihar, was an extreme case illustrating how indebtedness resulted in the perpetual 'attachment' of the debtor to his creditor or a labourer. Unlike a free labourer a *kamiya* had to do all sorts of work for his creditor besides the usual field work, and was invariably paid in inferior grains, such as *khesari*. The well-known aphorism 'A *kamiya* gets a quarter of the outturn of his work' emphasises



how the creditor exploited the labour of an indebted *kamiya*. Even in the ordinary cases where agricultural labourers were indebted to the superior peasants the quantum of expropriation by the latter was very high. In Jessore an agricultural labourer taking a cash advance, which seldom exceeded three or four rupees for the season, and using the plough of his creditor had to cultivate the land of his creditor for twenty days in a month. The creditor peasant provided the labourer with food only once a day. Where the creditor paid the rent and provided the seed grain only, he claimed half of the total produce. If the seed grain was not supplied by him, he paid half of the reaping expenses. If he did not provide the seed grain nor pay for the reaping, he still appropriated 40% of the total produce.<sup>230</sup> In Birbhum and Bankura, where 'many well-to-do farmers holding from 30 to 80 *bigahs*. . . . extensively employed' agricultural labourers, the latter got one-third of the produce. The labourer was provided with food for himself and his family by his employer throughout the year, and the whole quantity was deducted from his due share. 'As a rule, the servant does not get enough to pay off his old debts'.<sup>231</sup> Such a system was more widely prevalent in Nadia.<sup>232</sup>

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14. Colin Clark and Margaret Haswell, *The Economics of Subsistence Agriculture*. London, 1964. p. 69.
15. Myint, *The Economics of the Developing Countries*. London, 1965. p. 44.
16. Population statistics of some districts of western, central and northern Bengal

				Percentage of variation	
				1872-81	1881-91
<i>Burdwan Division</i>					
Burdwan	...	...	...	- 6.2	- 0.1
Birbhum	...	...	...	- 6.95	+ 0.6
Bankura	...	...	...	+ 7.55	+ 2.7
Midnapur	...	...	...	- 1.07	+ 5.3
Hugli	...	...	...	- 12.49	+ 6.0
<i>Presidency Division</i>					
24-Parganas	...	...	...	+ 5.93	+ 12.5
Nadia	...	...	...	+ 11.31	- 1.1
Jessore	...	...	...	+ 8.66	- 6.1
Khulna	...	...	...	+ 3.15	+ 8.4
Mursidabad	...	...	...	+ 1.04	+ 1.9
<i>Rajshahy Division</i>					
Dinajpur	...	...	...	+ .82	+ 2.7
Rajshahy	...	...	...	+ 2.14	+ 1.2
Rangpur	...	...	...	- 2.58	- 1.6
Bogra	...	...	...	+ 6.51	+ 11.2
Pubna	...	...	...	+ 8.26	+ 3.9

For 1872-81 Source : Report on Bengal Census Vol. 2. Table No. 2, p. 14.  
For 1881-91, Census of India, 1891, Vol. 3. The Report pp. 46-47.

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28. Peary Mohan Mukherji, *Selections from the writings and speeches*, Calcutta, 1924, p. 17.
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30. Bengal Local Taxation (Road Cess) Proceedings, Feb. 1874, Collection 3—1/3.
31. *Vide* No. 28.
32. Low lands or high lands growing early rice (*aus*) and a cold weather crop were about half of the total cultivated area of Burdwan.
33. *Vide* No. 29, para 77.
34. *Ibid*.
35. *Vide* No. 26, Answer No. 16.

36.
 

		Percentage of variation		
		1872-81	1881-91	1891-1901
<i>Dacca Division</i>				
Dacca	...	+14.21	+14.5	+10.6
Faridpur	...	+ 8.6	+ 9.8	+ 6.2
Bakarganj	...	+ .7	+13.2	+ 6.4
Mymensingh	...	+29.93	+13.4	+12.7
<i>Chattagong Division</i>				
Chittagong	...	+ .43	+13.8	+ 4.8
Noakhally	...	- 2.33	+23.0	+13.0
Tipperah	...	+ 7.85	+17.9	+18.7

(Source : For 1872-81, Report on Bengal Census, vol. 2, Table No. II  
 For 1881-91, Census of India, 1891, vol. 3, p. 46.  
 For 1891-1901, Census of India, 1901, vol. 4, p. 124.)

37.
 

Districts		1872-1881	1881-1891	1891-1901
Champaran	...	+19.5	+7.9	-3.7
Muzaffarpur	...	+14.9	+5.0	+1.5
Darbhanga	...	+23.1	+6.4	+3.9
Saran	...	+10.5	+7.3	-2.2
Patna	...	+12.6	+0.9	-8.4
Gaya	...	+ 9.1	+0.6	-3.7
Sahabad	...	+13.9	+5.8	-4.7

(Source : Census of India, 1901, Vol. 4, p. 124)

38. Bengal Census Report, 1881, para 137.
39. Census of India, 1891, vol. 3, para 110.
40. The estimates of the extent of cultivation in Bengal and Bihar were not based on any detailed statistical enquiry, except in a few cases. Macdonnell's *Report on the food grain supply and statistical review of the relief operations in the distressed districts of Bengal and Behar during the famine 1873-74* attempted a quantification of this extent on the basis of all the available sources of information, though Macdonnell himself doubted the reliability of some of them. He wrote with greater confidence of the Bihar districts. We tabulate some of the relevant statistics.



District	Extent of cultivation-percentage of the gross area	Page of the Report
Saran ...	88.3	29
Sahabad ...	75 in the Arrah and Buxar Subdivision; 40 in the Sassaram Subdivision.	4 50
Darbhangha ...	76; In the Tajpur S.D. of the district 85.	56
Muzaffarpur ...	73.	78
Champaran ...	77.	100

The extent of cultivation in some Bihar districts in the last decade of the 19th century.

District	Percentage of the gross area
Saran ...	79
Champaran ...	70
Muzaffarpur ...	80
Darbhangha ...	80.8
North Mongyr ...	80
Gaya ...	70

(Source : Kerr, Final Report on the survey and settlement operations in the district of Saran, 1893-1901, para 411-414.)

This percentage (approximated) for some Bengal districts (after the deduction of the area not available for cultivation from the gross area) :

District	Percentage	District	p.c.	District	p.c.
Bakarganj	87	Rajshahy	93		
Dacca	93	Murshidabad	76		
Mymensingh	87	Midnapur	89		
Noakhali	91	Birbhum	70		
Tipperah	79	Dinajpur	69		
Nadia	39				
Rangpur	74				
Burdwan	66				

(Source : Bengal District Gazetteer (Statistics) Series 1901-1902 : Table No. 7 in each case. The statistics for Nadia are obviously untrustworthy. The percentage according to Macdonnell's *Report* of 1876 was about 62. p. 346).

41. For details see Parimal Ray, *India's foreign trade since 1870*, London, 1934.
42. *Industrial and Commercial Revolution in the 19th century*, p. 182, quoted in Parimal Ray, *op. cit.*
43. Report on the administration of the Customs Department for 1874-75. Resolution of the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department (Statistics), 9 Nov. 1875, para 16.





## 44. Statistics of export from 1872-73 onwards.

		Cwt.			Cwt.
1872-73	...	5,779,508	1885-86	...	5,537,785
1873-74	...	3,637,611	1886-87	...	5,113,416
1874-75	...	2,724,232	1887-88	...	6,762,544
1875-76	...	3,873,854	1888-89	...	5,770,637
1876-77	...	5,243,704			
1877-78	...	5,526,053			
1878-79	...	5,701,035			
1879-80	...	3,831,083			
1880-81	...	5,948,208			
1881-82	...	6,350,092			
1882-83	...	6,607,497			
1883-84	...	6,082,023			
1884-85	...	4,953,065			

(Source : Report of the administration of the Customs Department for the respective years.)

45. *ibid.*, see the statistics of export form 1876-77 to 1878-79.
46. Bengal Irrigation Proceedings, Jan. 1875, Appendix. Note on Rice Statistics by J. W. Ottley, Assistant to Chief Engineer, Irrigation Branch, Bengal, 12 Oct. 1874.
47. Report on the administration of the Customs Department, 1884-85, para 65; 1886-87, para 65.
48. Bengal General Dept. Proceedings, May 1872, No. 10. W.Lef. Robinson's report, 19th April 1872, para 6.
49. H. Maxwell-Lefroy, Imperial Silk Specialist, *Report on an enquiry into the silk industry in India*, Calcutta, 1917, vol 1. The following table of prices from 1855 to 1886 was contained in a letter from the firm Jardine, Skinner & Co. to the Government of Bengal.

Year		Price per seer Rs. As. P.	Year		Price
1855-56	...	22-15-0	1871-72	...	23-10-7
1856-57	...	20- 4-11	1872-73	...	18- 2-8
1857-58	...	19- 8-9	1873-74	...	15- 9-4
1858-59	...	21- 1-9	1874-75	...	12- 8-4
1859-60	...	20-13-0	1875-76	...	16- 4-4
1860-61	...	18- 1-11	1876-77	...	20- 2-3
1861-62	...	18-15-11	1877-78	...	14- 8-9
1862-63	...	18- 3-9	1878-79	...	16- 1-0
1863-64	...	16- 9-8	1879-80	...	17- 8-8
1864-65	...	21- 0-9	1880-81	...	17- 6-0
1865-66	...	24- 0-4	1881-82	...	16-15-10
1866-67	...	23- 6-2	1882-83	...	15-10-6
1867-68	...	24-14-7	1883-84	...	13-12-7
1868-69	...	23- 6-2	1884-85	...	12-11-5
1869-70	...	23- 8-6	1885-86	...	17- 6-9
1870-71	...	20-12-10			



50. Bengal Agricultural Proceedings, Head-No. 2, April 1887.  
 51. *Vide* No. 49. Lefroy's Report, p. 11, para 10.  
 52.

Year	Acre	Source
1884	282,000	India Agricultural and Horticultural Proceedings May 1884, No. 57.
1899-1900	862,200	Area and Yield of Certain crops, 1891-92 to 1899-1900, p. 27.

53. Minden Wilson, History of Behar. Part: Tirhoot and its inhabitants. Calcutta, 1908, p. 247. As Wilson tells us, the sugar project and its mis-carriage provided a theme for a poem by a local George Williamson :

The Lion King stretched out his hand,  
 Talked of the cheapness of labour and richness of land,  
 Of Twenty maunds a Begah  
 Take the cypher from the aught, divide the ten by two,  
 The result will be the product exceeedd but by few,  
 Then things went on right jolly,  
 Till the district was dotted o'ver with monuments of folly.

pp. 222-23.

54. In 1855 the quantity exported was 1,23,552 factory maunds. In 1861-62, it fell to 68,710. According to the Government of Bengal, the year had the 'smallest exports'. Report on the administration of the Customs Dept. for 1874-75. Resolution on the Report by the Govt. of Bengal, Revenue Dept. (Statistics), 9 Nov. 1875, para 12.  
 55. Statistics for the years 1879-80 to 1883-84 :

				In factory maunds	
				Lower Bengal	Bihar
1879-80	...	...	...	14,400	28,400
1880-81	...	...	...	23,000	66,000
1881-82	...	...	...	17,200	58,000
1882-83	...	...	...	18,000	59,000
1883-84	...	...	...	17,000	58,500

(Source : Report on the Administration of the Customs Department for these years.)

56. Bengal General (Misc.) Progs. Oct. 1875, File 149—I. Divisional Commissioner's Annual Report on the Rajshahy and Cooch Behar Division, 1874-75 by Cockerell, 31 Aug. 1875, para 37.  
 57. *Ibid.*, Aug. 1876, File 122—I. Divisional Commissioner's Annual Report for 1875-76 on Rajshahy and Cooch Behar. 24 July 1876, para 24.  
 58. Complete statistics for the whole of Bihar are not available. The following are the statistics for Muzaffarpur, one of the most important indigo growing regions in Bihar,



Year						Bigahs of 4,225 sq. yards
1882-83	...	...	...	...	...	65,000
1883-84	...	...	...	...	...	69,7000
1884-85	...	...	...	...	...	76,960
1885-86	...	...	...	...	...	80,000
1897	...	...	...	...	...	99,959

Thus in the last two decades of the 19th century the cultivation of indigo increased by nearly 53%. (Source : Stevenson Moore, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Muzaffarpur District, 1892-99*. Calcutta, 1901, para 875.

59. *Ibid*, para 872.

60.

Year	Acres	Year	Acres	Year	Acres
1892-93	645,950	1897-98	529,500	1902-03	255,500
1893-94	648,928	1898-99	512,100	1903-04	249,700
1894-95	629,100	1899-1900	449,200	1904-05	223,100
1895-96	552,700	1900-01	360,600	1905-06	170,000
1896-97	582,200	1901-02	311,200		

Cultivation thus declined by more than 73% in the course of 14 years. (Source : Area and Yield of certain crops, 1891-92 to 1909-1910. Published by Commercial Intelligence Dept., Govt. of India.)

61. Statistics of poppy cultivation in Bihar (from 1860-61 to 1889-90) and Benares (1861-62 to 1889-90).

Year						In bigahs
				Bihar	Benares	
1860-61	...	...	...	2,81,126	—	
1861-62	...	...	...	3,98,251	2,22,914	
1862-63	...	...	...	4,25,353	2,87,008	
1863-64	...	...	...	4,50,552	3,58,107	
1864-65	...	...	...	4,17,344	3,47,840	
1865-66	...	...	...	4,10,505	2,27,325	
1866-67	...	...	...	4,44,530	2,57,546	
1867-68	...	...	...	4,61,675	2,65,572	
1868-69	...	...	...	4,06,554	2,87,785	
1869-70	...	...	...	4,68,580	3,07,446	
1870-71	...	...	...	4,87,550	3,37,812	
1871-72	...	...	...	4,97,801	3,58,922	
1872-73	...	...	...	4,71,780	3,42,705	
1873-74	...	...	...	4,10,278	3,19,432	
1874-75	...	...	...	5,10,313	3,59,353	
1875-76	...	...	...	4,70,926	3,78,242	
1876-77	...	...	...	5,17,377	3,72,245	



Year	In bigahs	
	Bihar	Benares
1877-78	4,05,622	3,42,663
1878-79	4,15,289	3,05,820
1879-80	4,61,086	4,38,531
1880-81	4,34,786	4,23,265
1881-82	4,60,382	3,89,659
1882-83	3,94,232	3,98,952
1883-84	3,99,518	4,09,831
1884-85	4,33,161	4,71,232
1885-86	4,53,510	4,98,360
1886-87	4,58,266	4,41,018
1887-88	4,47,759	4,10,813
1888-89	4,05,866	3,29,917
1889-90	3,98,230	3,73,861

(Source : For the years 1860-61 to 1870-71 Report on the administration of the Opium Dept. for the 1870-71; for the following two years *ibid*, 1877-78 for 1873-74 to 1883-84. Royal Commission on Opium, vol. 2, appendix No. 5; for 1884-85 to 1889-90 Report on the administration of the Opium Dept., 1893-94.)

62. 1845-46 2,96,282 bigahs

1885-86 9,51,870 "

63. Bengal Revenue Department Progs., (Misc. Revenue) April, 1860, No. 75. Letter of 16th April, 1860.

64. *Ibid*, June, 1861, No. 78. Letter of 25 June 1861.

65. *Ibid*, Dec., 1864, No. 19, Govt. of Bengal to the Board of Revenue, 25 Aug. 1864.

66. Bengal Opium Progs, June 1877, Collection 1-64. Resolution of the Govt. of India, Finance Dept., 6 June 1877.

67. Report on the administration of the Opium Dept., 1887-88, Benares Opium Agent to the Board of Revenue, 30 Nov. 1888, para 3.

68.	In acres Districts			Year 1872	Year 1900
	Rangpur	...	...	100,000	277,000
	Rajshahy	...	...	14,300	107,800
	Mymensingh	...	...	84,000	519,000
	Faridpur	...	...	16,600	100,000
	Tipperah	...	...	78,400	219,000

(Source : N. C. Chaudhuri, *Jute in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1908, pp. 63-66 Chaudhuri belonged to the Agricultural Dept., Govt. of Bengal. The cultivation in Purnea increased from 70,000 acres in 1870-71 to 118,044 acres in the first decade of the 20th century.

(Source : J. Byrne, *Final Report on the Survey & Settlement Operations in Purnea* 1901-1908. (Cal. 1908) para 317.

The cultivation of jute increased from 1,403,445 acres in 1891-92 to 3,145,000 acres in 1905-06—an increase of more than 55%. (Source : Area and yield of certain crops, 1891-92 to 1905-06.)





69. J. A. Hubback, *Final Report on the survey and settlement operations in the district of Sahabad, 1907-1916*, para 310.
70. Report on the administration of the Opium Dept., 1887-88; Bihar Opium Agent to the Board of Revenue, 27 Nov. 1888, para 4.
71. For the first three districts the source is : Kerr, *Final Report on the survey and settlement operations in Saran, 1893-1901*, para 640; for Darbhanga, Kerr, *Final Report on the survey and settlement operations in the district of Darbhanga, 1896-1903*, para 486.
72. Area and Yield of certain crops, 1891-92 to 1905-06, published by the Commercial Intelligence Dept., Govt. of India.
73. District Gazetteer (Statistics) for the respective districts 1901-1902. Table No. vii in each case.
74. Hem Chandra Kar, Report on the cultivation of and trade in jute. Calcutta 1877, para 204.
75. *Ibid*, para 209.
76. Report on the administration of the Customs Department, 1876-77, para 102.
77. *Ibid*, 1877-78, para 52.
78. Bengal General (Misc.) Proceedings, Nov. 1877, File 162-1/15 Divisional Commissioner's Annual Report for Patna, 1876-77, 21 Sept. 1877. For details see my book, *Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal, 1757-1900*, Calcutta 1964, pp. 138-142.
79. What follows is a summary of pages 136-37 of my book.
80. Kerr, *Darbhanga Settlement Report etc.*, vide reference No. 71, para 489.
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*Group 1: Entire revenue paying estates*

	No. of transactions	Mahajans as purchasers	Zamin-dars	Intermediate tenure holders	Ryots	Others
1. Entire revenue paying estates	8,460	1,539	2,254	1,597	798	4,697
2. Shares in revenue paying estates ...	66,814	9,338	43,244	15,301	9,158	9,456
3. Revenue free properties ...	148,325	26,732	13,395	19,826	53,239	51,222
4. Intermediate tenures ...	146,702	15,419	12,605	91,265	47,594	38,460
5. Interests intermediate between tenures and rights of occupancy or holdings at fixed rates ...	49,769	8,935	7,081	10,955	17,891	23,092

(Source : Bengal Registration Reports etc. of these years. The discrepancy between the number of transactions and the number of purchasers is due to the fact that 'in some transactions there must have been two more purchasers', Bengal Registration Report, 1881-82, para 18.)



184. *Ibid*, 1880-81, para 18.
185. *Ibid*, 1884-85, para 55.
186. In the years 1881-82 to 1887-88 the total number of purchasers classified as 'others' was 4470, of whom the purchasers in Calcutta and Chittagong were 2169 and 1365 respectively.
187. Out of 634 cases of such purchases in the years 1883-84 to 1887-88, 437 were in Chittagong.
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191. *Proposed amendment of the sale law of Bengal*, Calcutta 1889. (A collection of papers relating to sale laws, printed for official use).
192. *Ibid*, letter of 24 March 1888 to the Board of Revenue, page 20.
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194. Statistics of purchasers of ryoti holdings at fixed rate (marked A) and holdings of occupancy ryots (marked B) in the years 1880-81 to 1886-87.

			Mahajans	Zamindars of hold- ings sold	Other zamindars	Ryots	Others
A.	...	...	19928	3933	11339	62975	33562
B.	...	...	34034	5350	13404	176800	38810

(Source : Bengal Registration Reports etc. of these years).

195. Board of Revenue's *Report on the land revenue administration of Bengal*, 1876-77, para 125.
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197.	Year	No. of leases	Year	No. of leases	Year	No. of leases
	1868-69	36,830	1875-76	109,399	1882-83	70,764
	1869-70	34,506	1876-77	102,147	1883-84	75,552
	1870-71	47,360	1877-78	108,678	1884-85	85,519
	1871-72	47,181	1878-79	119,015	1885-86	87,236
	1872-73	54,926	1879-80	126,137	1886-87	78,766
	1873-74	66,398	1880-81	102,512	1887-88	71,642
	1874-75	100,325	1881-82	74,639		

198. Report of the Registration Department, Bengal, 1883-84, para 13.
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202. India Famine Progs., Dec. 1888, No. 8, Serial No. 27. Letter to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Dept., 17 May 1888, para 60.
203. *Ibid*, paras 29-41,



204. *Ibid*, paras 80-81.
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222. *Vide* No. 202, Commissioner of Presidency Division to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Dept., 17 May 1888, para 10.
223. *Ibid*, paras 28-29.
224. *Vide* No. 221, 1880-81.
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226. Bengal Judicial Progs, 27 Sept. 1855, Nos. 62-63.
227. Bengal General (Misc.) Progs., Nov. 1873, File 1—100/109. Divisional Commissioner's Annual Report, Patna, 1872-73, Appendix iii, Letter of 11 April 1873.
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## FOREIGN AND INLAND TRADE, 1833-1905

### I FOREIGN TRADE

The renewal of the Charter in 1833 marked a definite stage in the history of the East India Company. It became clear in the long debates in Parliament before the renewal that the Company's monopoly of the China trade would go the way of the old Indian one. Ideas of Reform and Free Trade were then triumphant in England. The principles which had been laid down more than fifty-five years ago by Adam Smith were then guiding British commercial and fiscal policy. The logic of events had converted the British commercial and industrial classes to Smith's views. The free trade movement in England ultimately created a new commercial outlook and a new popular faith in the virtues of free competitive enterprise. Huskisson himself led the attack upon the East India Company which still enjoyed many exclusive privileges. Eventually it was not even permitted to compete in the China trade on level terms with private traders. The Charter Act of 1833 finally put an end to the commercial activities of the Company.

India's foreign trade was naturally influenced by these economic trends in the metropolitan country which had the most highly developed capitalistic organisation of the day and where technological changes had created an entirely new basis for commercial expansion. Throughout most of the nineteenth century capitalism was highly competitive, in the sense that individual firms were fairly small and numerous in each industry. Free trade and free competition were the watchwords of the hour. It was usual for business to resort to price-competition and cheaper commodities as a way of stealing a larger share of the market.<sup>1</sup> Although after 1813 all the European nations had been placed on an equal footing with Great Britain in respect of trade with India, India's foreign trade continued primarily with Great Britain until almost the end of the nineteenth century. This was owing partly to the unrivalled maritime supremacy and industrial development of Great Britain and partly to its political dominion in India. The period 1833-1905 fell within that remarkable century 1815-1914 which has been called 'the Great Peace' for England.

India like other parts of the British empire performed the functions of a primary producer in relation to the British economy supplying food-stuffs and raw materials comparatively little of which competed with the produce of British agriculture in return for manufactures-cotton and woollen textiles, iron, tin, cutlery, hardware and many other products.

Bengal fully shared in the foreign trade of India. Indigo which had been favoured by the East India Company lost its old importance as jute and tea cultivation grew after the 1830's and 1840's. Bengal also imported her full share of manufactured goods. Furthermore, in the





complicated pattern of Great Britain's Far Eastern accounts, heavy annual payments due from India to Britain were remitted in the form of China tea, exported via India because the China trade was based upon Calcutta. Until China became one of the great markets for Lancashire textiles, opium, grown in India and exported to China by British firms, formed the main article of payment for Britain's imports of Chinese tea, silks and other products.<sup>2</sup>

Bengal's trading patterns of the mid-century came to be broken up and rearranged in a new and more complicated manner late in Victorian days when a new stage was reached in the economic development of the world. The mainspring of this great change was the comparatively rapid industrialization of Western Europe, especially of Germany and France, and of the United States of America. This process brought into being a new and highly competitive international system of industrial production. Bengal's foreign trade, as a part of that of India, was greatly influenced by the new international trading system as distinct from that of the mid-nineteenth century. This was both complementary and fiercely competitive in character.<sup>3</sup> The point of interest, however, is that India like other colonies was an important market and source of supplies for Britain especially when other markets were depressed. The rate of this trade was comparatively rapid in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when British overseas trade was meeting new difficulties in other quarters in the way of tariffs and growing domestic industries.<sup>4</sup>

#### COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION

The overseas trade of Bengal which had been growing since 1833 quickened remarkably in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was, to some extent, made possible by improved transport and speedier methods of communication. These developments were rightly regarded as revolutionary. The introduction of steam navigation and the completion of a general system of railways by 1871 were changing the pattern of Bengal's internal as well as port-hinterland trade. The process was also helped by the development of roads and canals. In the beginning of 1865 the first telegraphic connection between Europe and India was established. In 1871 India was connected with Europe by cable. A really effective postal system with cheap postage rates had been introduced in 1854. The growth of Bengal's overseas commerce was so rapid that it became imperative to overhaul the port administration of Calcutta, Bengal's chief port, and a new Port Trust took over control in 1870.<sup>5</sup> Port installations and facilities were greatly improved in the course of the next thirty years. The construction of the Howrah bridge over the river Hooghly in 1874 also helped the commerce of the port. In the interior new markets were opened up and new sources of supply were tapped which had hitherto been outside the pale of commerce. The ryot was brought into the ambit of world trading conditions.



One great single factor that stimulated the growth of the commerce of Bengal and for that matter the commerce of India and of the East was the opening of the Suez canal in 1869. This shortened the voyage between England and India by four thousand miles, changed the strategic pattern of the Eastern hemisphere and at first enabled Great Britain to take the fullest advantage of the lead she had secured over her rivals as a manufacturing country. Her competitive position in Eastern markets was greatly assisted by the opening of the Suez canal. This improvement caused long-term changes in the size and pattern of Bengal's overseas trade. The gradual replacement of sailing ships by steamers also greatly helped the process. By the middle of the 1880's shipments were brisk for most of the year and no longer entirely dependent upon the south-west and north-east monsoons. All this greatly increased the turnover of business.

### POLITICAL STABILITY

Besides these basic factors of change, some other causes operated in favour of the growth of trade and commerce in Bengal. During the period under survey, Bengal enjoyed relative political stability and peace which provided conditions in which commerce could thrive. This region was not directly affected by wars which the British fought, among others, with the Sikhs, the Afghans or the Burmese. Even the main incidents of the uprising of 1857 took place in areas far away from Bengal proper and only on the outer fringes of the Presidency. Bengal's trade did not suffer much as a result of this movement.

Except the Santal insurrection of 1855 and the indigo disputes of 1859 Bengal was not seriously troubled by any major internal disorder. Although Orissa and Bihar were visited by famine respectively in 1866 and 1873, Bengal proper was fortunate enough to have escaped any such calamity, not to speak anything in the nature of the disaster which had ruined Bengal's economy in 1770.

### COMMERCIAL ORGANISATIONS

One of the remarkable features of Bengal's commercial life was the tendency towards better organisation. Since the foreign trade of Bengal was mainly in the hands of the British, the early commercial organisations were naturally formed under British auspices. But as the pace of Bengal's economic development quickened and Indians increasingly came to participate in it, purely Indian commercial organisations, modelled on the British type, began to appear.

The principal non-official organisations connected with trade were the Chambers of Commerce. The Calcutta Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1834, when Lord William Bentinck was Governor-General. It is interesting to note that Indo-British firms like Rustomjee Cowasjee & Co. and Carr, Tagore & Co. were members of this Chamber.<sup>6</sup> The Calcutta



Chamber was more or less reconstituted and it emerged as the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in 1853. As this body mainly represented European interests the need of a similar body to represent growing Indian commercial interests was naturally felt. In 1887 was founded the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta, which is the premier institution of the Indian commercial community in Bengal and the oldest Indian Chamber of Commerce in India. Towards the end of the period under review, Chambers of Commerce were founded in some other subordinate ports of Bengal. The Chittagong Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1906 to represent the commercial interests of European and Indian communities in Eastern Bengal. The objects of the Naraingunge Chamber of Commerce were also to promote and protect trade, commerce and manufactures of Eastern Bengal in particular. The Upper India Chamber of Commerce had been inaugurated in 1888.

Closely connected with the Chambers of Commerce, several commercial associations representing particular branches of trade also started operating during this period. The Calcutta Wheat and Seed Trade Association was formed in 1884 for the regulation of Calcutta trade in those commodities. Calcutta Jute Fabrics Shippers' Association was founded in 1893, its objects being to encourage and secure united feeling and action among shippers, to collect and classify facts, statistics and generally to protect the interests of those engaged in the jute fabrics export trade of the port of Calcutta.

The Trades Associations represented the retail traders. The Calcutta Trades Association had been founded as early as 1830 with the object of encouraging friendly communication among persons engaged in business in Calcutta and to collect and circulate statistics and other information concerning retail trade. In 1890 was founded the Calcutta Import Trade Association to encourage and secure united feeling and action among importers and generally to promote and protect the interests of those engaged in the import trade of the port of Calcutta.

The majority of these commercial organisations represented European interests. Some like the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce represented Indian mercantile interests in general while a few served both European and Indian communities. Towards the close of our period, there was a tendency among certain Indian business communities to form exclusive commercial organisations of their own. The Marwari Association of Calcutta was founded in 1898 with the object of promoting the social, moral and intellectual as well as the commercial well-being of the Marwari community. The Marwari Chamber of Commerce was established two years later. These were indicative of the growing importance of the Marwaris as a distinct group in the commercial life of Calcutta.<sup>7</sup>

Another important development that must be mentioned in this connection was the establishment of the Calcutta Stock Exchange. The question of a Commercial Exchange was mooted in Calcutta as far back



as 1857. In 1858 the idea took practical shape in the form of a mercantile exchange. It was renamed by special permission of Queen Victoria and was styled the Royal Exchange in 1893.<sup>8</sup>

### COMMERCIAL BANKING

The growing volume of Bengal's foreign trade demanded better facilities of commercial banking. Cheaper and safer banking was one of the main demands of the free traders of 1833 and the grant of a charter to the Union Bank (founded in 1829) in 1835 signalised their victory. The Bank of Bengal was established in 1840 but like other Presidency Banks it had to work under serious restrictions so far as exchange operations were concerned.

The Union Bank of which Dwarkanath Tagore was a director, crashed with many other private banking and agency concerns during the crisis of 1847-48. The policy of the Company in this respect was most unimaginative and unhelpful. The remarkable growth of India's trade with Britain and the Far East urgently demanded the introduction of regular exchange banking. The permission given by the British Treasury in 1851 to the Oriental Bank to establish agencies in India "for the purposes of exchange, deposit and remittance" was a significant step in that direction. The Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China which started functioning in Calcutta in 1858 met a long-felt necessity. As the Presidency Banks were precluded from dealing in foreign exchange, that requirement was met by Exchange Banks like the National Bank of India, the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation and the Chartered Mercantile Bank of India, London and China.<sup>9</sup> As a result of the recession of the early sixties the mortality among the Eastern banks was high. At the beginning of 1866 there had been twenty-two exchange banks in Calcutta. The following year there were only seven left in India. Apart from the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, there were the Agra Bank Ltd., the Delhi and London Bank Ltd., the Chartered Mercantile Bank of India, London and China, the National Bank of India Ltd., the Oriental Bank Corporation and the Comptoir d' Escompte de Paris. By the turn of the century the Agra Bank was liquidated.<sup>10</sup> The Exchange Banks suffered from the constant fluctuation of exchange rate during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and yet made an important contribution to India's economic growth by assuming responsibility for a large part of the exchange risks. Bengal's foreign trade was largely sustained during these critical years by the Exchange Banks.

### EXCHANGE CRISIS

The effect of the fall in the value of silver in terms of gold currencies during the years 1872-94 on Indian exchange and consequently on commerce was disastrous. Internal prices rose and owing to the fact that



prices in gold standard countries continued to fall, export did not benefit from a falling exchange to the extent that might have been expected. Financial conditions were chaotic. Bimetallism was favoured by public and official opinion. But the failure of the Brussels Conference of 1892 destroyed the hopes of bimetallists. India was forced to find its own solution to the problem of the rupee. On the recommendation of the Herschell Committee of 1892-93 the mints in India were closed to the free coinage of silver. India abandoned the silver standard and henceforth the rupee was to be a token coin, a "note" printed on silver, linked to gold.

It took five years for exchange to reach 1 s. 4 d. but thereafter it remained steady, to the great benefit of traders and bankers, for nearly twenty years. The recommendations of the Herschell Committee were supplemented by that of the Fowler Committee in 1898-99 and as a result India adopted what became known as the Gold Exchange Standard. This meant, in effect, that while retaining a silver currency for internal circulation, external requirements were met by the exchange of rupees on a fixed gold basis, the rate of 1 s. 4 d. being chosen for stabilisation.

Bengal's foreign trade was naturally affected by the violent fluctuations of exchange. Its evil effects, however, were largely neutralised by unprecedented reduction in sea freights, relaxation of customs duties and above all by the driving force of the new economic environment.<sup>11</sup> The end of the period of monetary uncertainty after 1893 had a tonic affect on foreign trade and commercial progress remained unhampered for a considerable number of years.<sup>12</sup> It is necessary to point out that Bengal's trade with that part of the world which remained yet on silver basis stagnated as a result of the policy of the closure of the mints to the free coinage of silver. The China trade, in particular, was greatly affected and and it never regained its old importance.

### TARIFF POLICY

The last Charter Act of 1853, while introducing many administrative changes, did not have any great commercial implications. The Act was obviously preparing the way for the assumption of the government of India by the Crown in name as well as in fact, for it gave no definite renewal of the charter for a term of years, as former measures had done. The uprising of 1857 shook the old system of government to its foundations and utterly discredited the crude methods of finance which were a legacy of very old times. The Act of 1858 transferred the government of India from the Company to the Crown and brought changes which influenced the economic development of India and consequently of Bengal. The reforms of Wilson and Laing gave a new tone to Indian public finance. Paper currency and the income tax were introduced.

Bengal's foreign trade also shared in the general improvement in the material conditions in the years following the reforms of 1858. The Free Trade principle in England was completed by the gradual removal of all



those remaining import duties which might have a protective effect. In India the favourable state of the finances enabled Lord Northbrook to make great advances towards the same ideal.

The tariff duties levied by the East India Company varied from  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  to 5% for British goods, double rates being charged on foreign goods. In 1859 the differential duties were abolished and the general rate was raised to 10%. It was reduced to  $7\frac{1}{2}\%$  in 1864 and to 5% in 1875. General customs duties were abolished in 1882 and from that year till 1894 no import duties were levied except those on arms and ammunition and on liquors, opium and salt, and a duty of  $\frac{1}{2}$  anna per gallon on petroleum which was imposed for revenue purposes in 1888.

In 1894 it was considered necessary, owing to the fall in the sterling value of the rupee, to reimpose import duties at a general rate of 5%. Railway materials and machinery were, however, left free, and the duty on iron and steel was fixed at 1%. Later in the same year, cotton piece-goods and yarn, which had remained free, were subjected to a duty of 5% accompanied by an excise duty of 5% on Indian yarn of counts above 20 s. In 1896 the duty on cotton piece-goods was lowered to  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$ ; an excise duty at the same rate was placed on all Indian mill-woven cloth, cotton yarn being admitted free. It is interesting to notice that Lord Northbrook, though a convinced Free Trader, was in favour of retaining a low general tariff upon imports for revenue purposes, though it might unavoidably involve slight protective effects which were considered necessary in the special conditions prevailing in India. When the government of Disraeli had put pressure on him to abolish even the 5% duty on Manchester cotton goods, he sturdily defused to do so, on the ground that Indian Exchequer could not afford to surrender the revenue and that it was politically unwise to give any plausible ground for the insinuation that the interests of Lancashire were to override those of India.

Until 1860 there was a general export duty of 3% *ad volerem*, but by 1875 it was only applicable to oil, rice, indigo and lac. The duty on wheat was abolished in 1873 and the duties on indigo and lac were remitted in 1880, but the duty of 3 annas per maund on rice continued till 1930.<sup>13</sup>

The reduction of ocean freights and the lowering of customs barriers were among the influences which contributed to the growth of trade during the second half of the period under survey. The tariff policy of the Government during this period was especially favourable for an unrestricted development of foreign trade.

### COURSE OF TRADE

The history of Bengal's foreign trade from 1833 to 1905 was one of fulfilment of the commercial revolution that had already taken place during the seventy five years of British rule. The export of hand-woven silks and cottons was no longer an important feature of Bengal trade. On the other hand, as a result of the industrial revolution in Europe an import



trade rapidly grew up in finished and semi-finished manufactures. This and the growing exports of fibres and oil-seeds which partly displaced food crops increased foreign trade very rapidly. By 1905 Bengal enjoyed a practical monopoly of the export of coal, raw and manufactured jute, lac, saltpetre and raw silk and a large and preponderating share in that of opium, indigo, rice, hides and tea.

A reference to Table I will show that notwithstanding years of occasional setback, there was, on the whole, an unmistakable record of growth. From an annual average of 640·85 lakhs of rupees during the quinquennium which ended in 1834-35, the aggregate value of the total foreign trade of Bengal went up to Rs. 9,430·21 lakhs in the last quinquennium under review. In other words, within the space of about seventy years, the total value of Bengal's trade in merchandise increased fourteen times.

TABLE—1

Bengal's foreign Trade (Merchandise) 1830-31 to 1904-05 Values in Lakhs of Rupees and Decimals of a Lakh

Quinquennium				Increase or Decrease per cent		
	Imports	Exports	Total	Imports	Exports	Total
1830-31 to 1834-35	234·98	405·87	640·85	—	—	—
1835-36 to 1839-40	302·46	656·11	958·57	+28·5	+61·5	+49·6
1840-41 to 1844-45	480·86	887·69	1368·56	+58·9	+35·3	+42·8
1845-46 to 1849-50	491·93	958·71	1450·64	+ 2·2	+ 7·00	+ 5·9
1850-51 to 1854-55	594·93	1075·45	1670·39	+20·9	+12·2	+15·2
1855-56 to 1859-60	938·88	1349·36	2288·25	+57·8	+25·4	+37
1860-61 to 1864-65	1555·47	1977·60	3533·07	+65·7	+46·5	+54·4
1865-66 to 1869-70	2144·14	2409·50	4553·64	+37·8	+21·8	+28·8
1870-71 to 1874-75	1648·61	2398·72	4047·33	-23·1	- 0·45	-11·1
1875-76 to 1879-80	1879·71	2793·57	4673·28	+14·0	+16·4	+15·4
1880-81 to 1884-85	2149·63	3319·94	5469·58	+14·3	+18·8	+17
1885-86 to 1889-90	2343·62	3539·02	5882·65	+ 9·02	+ 6·5	+ 7·5
1890-91 to 1894-95	2673·55	4019·60	6693·16	+14·07	+13·5	+13·7
1895-96 to 1899-1900	2846·25	4575·60	7422·85	+ 6·4	+13·8	+10·9
1900-01 to 1904-05	3695·69	5734·52	9430·21	+28·8	+25·3	+27

Source : (i) *Statistics of the Trade of the Port of Calcutta, 1830-1862* Parts I & II, by H.N.I. Wood, Secretary, Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

(ii) *Reports on the External Commerce of Bengal, 1860-61 to 1867-68.*

(iii) *Annual Volume of Trade and Navigation for the Presidency of Bengal having a sea-borne Trade, 1868-69 to 1874-75.*

(iv) *Annual Statement of the Sea-borne Trade and Navigation of the Bengal Presidency, 1785-76 to 1899-1900.*

(v) *Reports on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1900-01 to 1905-06.*



An analysis of the structure of Bengal trade and an attempt to estimate overall changes show that progress was by no means uniform. During the quinquennium 1835-36 to 1839-40 the average trade increased by 49·6%. The rate of increase during the next period was 42·8%. But in the following quinquennium (1845-46 to 1849-50) the rate of increase was 5·9% only. These were years of commercial depression all over the world. In Calcutta the crisis of 1847-48 was keenly felt and its effects on the commercial life of Bengal were adverse. Many agency houses came to grief. The house of Carr, Tagore and Company failed. It was a year of disaster to so many commercial concerns in Calcutta that 1847 came to be regarded as a black year. The rising Indian merchants also were badly hit by the crisis and only a few like Prawn Kissen Law were able to weather the storm.<sup>14</sup> The effects of the crisis of 1847-48, however, did not last long. Trade in the quinquennium 1850-51 to 1854-55 showed a 15·2% increase. The pace of advance quickened remarkably in the next five-year period which showed an increase of 37%. This was followed by an even more spectacular advance of 54·4% in the succeeding quinquennium which was followed by a 28·8% increase in the period 1865-66 to 1869-70. During the quinquennium 1870-71 to 1874-75 the average trade actually declined by 11·1% from that of the previous five-year period. This decline can perhaps be explained by the growing exchange difficulties since 1872. The two following periods saw an accelerated pace of growth at the rate of 15·4% and 17% respectively as compared with each preceeding period. The rate of advance then somewhat slowed down and fell to 7·5% during the succeeding five-year period but went up to 13·7% during the quinquennium which followed. There was again a slight fall in the period 1895-96 to 1899-1900 when the increase was 10·9% as compared with the preceding five-year period. The rate of advance during the last quinquennium was most marked, the increase being 27% on that of the previous period.

If we now analyse and compare imports and exports separately, we notice that both imports and exports show a record of unbroken advance except in the quinquennium 1870-71 to 1874-75 when the value of imports and exports fell off by 23·1% and 0·45% respectively as compared with that of the previous five-year period.

In the foregoing paragraphs an attempt has been made to measure the growth of trade in terms of value. So it must be remembered the values were often influenced by fluctuations in price than by actual changes in the turnover of business.

#### INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF TRADE

The international distribution of Bengal's imports and exports did not change greatly till the eighties of the last century. The United Kingdom was the most important trading partner of India and consequently of Bengal. The metropolitan country was the chief supplier of goods



to Bengal and the most important market for her exports. In 1886-87 the percentage of the foreign trade of Calcutta with U.K. reached its highest point, viz., 65.94%. This trade began to fall off mainly as a result of greater facilities of direct communication with other countries like the U.S.A. and Germany.<sup>15</sup> In 1876-77 China was the second important foreign country with whom Bengal had trade relations. By 1899-1900 this place was taken by the U.S.A., and Germany came third. At the turn of the century Bengal was also trading with South America, Egypt and Arabia. In 1904-05 the continent-wise distribution of Bengal's trade was as follows<sup>16</sup> :

TABLE 2

Continent				Per cent
Europe	...	...	...	61.21
Asia	...	...	...	16.72
America	...	...	...	10.87
Australia	...	...	...	8.29
Africa	...	...	...	2.91

SOURCE : *Report on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1904-05*

In 1905-06 the trade with British possessions accounted for 64.73% of the total trade of Bengal and the trade with foreign countries was 35.27%. Though England's share of the total trade had fallen, still she occupied a pre-eminent position in Bengal trade and was responsible for 43.75% of it.<sup>17</sup>

### CHINA TRADE

Great Britain's China trade was based upon Calcutta. As imports from China figured ever more heavily in British purchases overseas, the payments problem led to war when the Imperial Government of China decided to prohibit the opium trade. The Anglo-Chinese War of 1842 was, in its immediate occasion, a trade war. The trade in opium produced in India was the most important export commodity of Bengal's China trade. This grew rapidly after the Anglo-Chinese War and continued until just before World War I. China also took a good quantity of raw cotton from Bengal. Some idea of the growth of the China trade can be formed from the following table :—

TABLE 3  
TOTAL TRADE WITH CHINA (MERCHANDISE)  
In Lakhs of Rupees

1834-35	...	...	...	1,38.86
1839-40	...	...	...	40.25
1844-45	...	...	...	2,35.79
1849-50	...	...	...	3,40.76



TABLE 3 (*Continued*)

In Lakhs of Rupees

1854-55	...	...	...	3,54.70
1859-60	...	...	...	4,23.74
1864-65	...	...	...	5,85.19
1869-70	...	...	...	6,01.30
1874-75	...	...	...	5,00.00
1879-80	...	...	...	9,05.31
1884-85	...	...	...	6,46.97
1889-90	...	...	...	6,50.87
1894-95	...	...	...	4,11.55
1899-1900	...	...	...	4,92.35
1904-05	...	...	...	6,82.93

The growth of trade with China began to slow down in 1892-93 and after. There was a heavy decrease in the export of opium. This was owing to the use of greater quantity of indigenous opium in China and also to increased consumption of Persian opium.<sup>18</sup> But it was primarily due to the fall in the price of silver following the closure of the mints in India in June 1893. Trade with silver-using countries was very adversely affected and the trade with China was immediately disorganised. The quantity of opium shipped from Calcutta fell from 40,427 cwt. in 1892-93 to 30,729 cwt. in 1893-94, the value declining from Rs. 341 to Rs. 233 lakhs. Another staple which suffered was cotton twist along with raw cotton. This introduced a new feature into Bengal's China trade in the form of export of treasure amounting to Rs. 4½ lakhs to Hongkong. Its shipment was accounted for by the closing of the mints<sup>19</sup>. Hitherto Bengal had imported from Hongkong, in return for opium and other exports, gold, silver and comparatively small amount of merchandise.<sup>20</sup> The decline in Bengal's trade with China or rather with Hongkong which had been continuous since 1891-92 received a check in 1895-96. In his review of the maritime trade of China for the year 1895, the Chinese Inspector-General of Customs referred to this and remarked that the reduced demand in China for Indian opium could be explained by the high prices of the Indian drug caused by its limited supply, and the improved quality and cheapness of the local variety. He also referred to the increasing importations of morphia indicative of a larger use of the so-called anti-opium pills as a substitute for opium. The Chinese Inspector-General pointed out that in 1895-96 the export of raw cotton to China increased from 5,006 to 23,473 cwt. He explained the larger shipments of cotton by saying that the right to import machinery conceded by the Treaty of Shimonoseki had given an extraordinary impetus to cotton spinning and weaving industries.<sup>21</sup> The large falling off in the export of Indian cotton twist and yarn in 1898-99 and after was the result of the development of the mill industry in China, supplemented by the rise in



exchange of the rupee in relation to that country. Similarly the export of Indian piece goods to China disappeared owing to the development of the weaving industry there.<sup>22</sup>

From 1896-97 the quantity of opium exported to China began to rise but as a result of lower prices at the Calcutta sales, there was a falling off in total value. The China trade began to recover from 1899-1900 onwards. In that year it was considerably larger than in any year since 1892-93. Exports from Calcutta expanded by no less than 15·2%. This was helped by short supplies of competing cheaper opium on the China market. As a result of this the demand for the Indian drug actually exceeded the supply obtainable in 1903-04. The Indian drug was also favoured by exchange which began to rise.<sup>23</sup> These, in short, were the broad changes in Bengal's trade with China during our period.

#### PATTERN OF TRADE

The general pattern of Bengal's foreign trade continued unchanged till the seventies and was typical of a country in India's stage of development. Many factors contributed to the expansion of Bengal's foreign commerce. Because of a flood of British manufactured goods and an accumulated and rapidly rising demand for Bengal's jute and tea, commercial development was rapid in the last thirty-five years of our period. The bulk of imports consisted of manufactured goods, of which textiles, particularly cotton, formed by far the most important group of commodities.

Bengal's principal imports had been cheap Manchester cotton goods, metals, liquors, woollen goods, salt, hardware and cutlery, apparel, coal, silk goods, spices and provisions. Railway and telegraph material, machinery, kerosene oil, matches and sugar were added increasingly to these as major imports.<sup>24</sup> Fourteen such items in 1876-77 absorbed 91% of the total value imported.<sup>25</sup> Then there were some minor items as ice, mainly from Boston, corals, clocks and watches, umbrellas, instruments and appliances, chemicals, and glassware.

The principal exports from Bengal were raw cotton, dying materials like indigo, food grains, hides and skins, lac, opium, oil seeds and saltpetre, raw silk, silk manufactures and unmanufactured tobacco.<sup>26</sup> Jute and jute manufactures, tea, coke and coal, cotton twist and yarn and cotton piece goods, mica, manganese, raw wool and woollen manufactures gradually entered the export list. By 1905-06 jute and jute manufactures together with hides and skins, opium and tea had become Bengal's major exports.<sup>27</sup>

Speaking generally, imports showed more variation than exports from decade to decade. With the beginning of the industrial revolution in Bengal and other parts of India exports of manufacturers and semi-manufactures also began to rise as the growing exports of jute manufactures, and cotton goods indicated. The bulk of exports, however, remained agricultural or consisted of raw materials. Jute, tea and opium remained



the most valuable types. Exports showed varying small changes, on the whole upward.

Great Britain originally contributed almost the whole of the imports and also carried off a large share of Bengal's exports. The main imports from China were chinaware, camphor, copper, paints and materials, silk and tea. Opium, raw cotton, gunny bags and saltpetre were the chief export items to China. France contributed silk piece goods, white cotton piece goods, precious stones, wines and spirits, while she took indigo, wheat, seeds, silk, sugar, tobacco, hides and skins. Bengal received tin, canes and rattans, cutch and gambier, betel nuts, pepper and tea from Singapore where she sent wax, opium, gunny bags, rice and castor oil. The chief single item of import from the United States was mineral oil and exports consisted of indigo, cutch and gambier, hides and skins, raw jute, gunny bags, shell lac and linseed. Ceylon exported coir yarn, cocoanuts, cocoanut oil, shells and betelnuts to Bengal from where she took gram and pulse, paddy, rice, wheat, oil cakes, opium and sugar. It was to feed the bulk of the population there, originally indentured labourers for working the sugar plantations, that large quantities of paddy and rice were exported to Mauritius. Other exports were gram and pulse, castor oil, oil cakes, saltpetre. From Australia animals (horses) and copper were mainly imported and the exports were gunny bags and tea. The efforts of the Calcutta Tea Syndicate to popularise Indian tea in Australia met with some success. The sale of Chinese tea was still high there because the retail trade in Australia and New Zealand was largely in the hands of the Chinese. Italy contributed corals, cotton goods, glass beads, false pearls, brandy, claret, lametta, salt, stone and marble, and took raw cotton, indigo, raw hides and skins, shellac, oil seeds, raw silk and tobacco.\* The trade with Trieste represented one of the routes by which central Europe was brought into communication with Calcutta. The main imports were cotton twist, coloured piece goods, glass beads, lametta, brass leaves and woollen piece goods. These were mostly of German manufacture and as in the case of the Italian ports, represented a large share of the Calcutta trade with Germany some of which found its way to London via Hamburg. The main exports to Austria were raw cotton, indigo, hides and skins, jute, shellac and tallow.<sup>28</sup> By 1890-91 direct communications with Germany had been established. Two regular direct lines of steamers were running between Calcutta and Hamburg. This gave an impetus to Bengal's foreign trade with Germany and Germany very quickly improved her position in this respect.<sup>29</sup> In 1893-94 Germany became the largest consumer of Bengal cotton valued at Rs. 29,70,079.<sup>30</sup> Russia participated in Bengal's foreign trade from 1887-88 when import of mineral oil from Batum began to compete with oil from America and Europe.<sup>31</sup> By the end of the period under survey Japan had entered the Bengal market. Japanese cotton twist and yarn began to compete with Manchester goods as Japanese matches competed with European varieties to the advantage of local consumers. Japan also imported good quantities



of Bengal raw cotton.<sup>32</sup> Salt was received mainly from Great Britain and also from Germany, Spain, Red Sea ports, Aden and Persian Gulf.<sup>33</sup>

#### MAJOR IMPORTS—COTTON PIECE-GOODS

The export of Bengal cotton textiles was a major part of the East India Company's commercial activities since it had started its operations in Bengal. It had its manufactories at Santipore, Dacca, Tandah and Birbhum. After the abolition of the Company's monopoly certain enterprising British merchants began to explore the opportunities of exploiting the Bengal market more effectively. One David McIntyre busied himself for some years in collecting information regarding the cotton fabrics most in use and in demand among the local people. With the help of his banian Biswambar Sen, he procured samples of all kinds and species of cloths in use among the various classes of Indians both in Bengal and the Upper Provinces. McIntyre not only profited himself but helped all British merchants in the field. Manchester cotton goods of various kinds were then imported on large scales which found a ready market, as soon as landed, at highly remunerative prices. Vast new sources of demand were opened up in the country within the space of 30 years (1839-40 to 1869-70) and the value of imports of British plain and cotton goods increased from Rs. 97,60,911 to Rs. 8,12,54,482.<sup>34</sup> In 1876-77 cotton goods accounted for 62% of the total Bengal imports. The great expansion of the trade creating new mass markets is illustrated by the following table:

TABLE 4

Year	Lakhs of rupees
1839-40	97.60
1849-50	1,81.27
1859-60	648.61
1869-70	812.54
1879-80	1,034.00
1889-90	1,312.43
1899-1900	1,505.27
1904-05	1,714.49

Source : (i) *Statistics of the Trade of the Port of Calcutta, 1830-1862* Parts I & II, by H.N.L. Wood, Secretary, Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

(ii) Reports on the External Commerce of Bengal, 1860-61 to 1867-68.

(iii) Annual Volume of Trade and Navigation for the Presidency of Bengal having a sea-borne Trade 1868-69 to 1874-75.

(iv) Annual Statement of the Sea-borne Trade and Navigation of the Bengal Presidency 1875-76 to 1899-1900.

(v) Reports on the Maritime Trade of Bengal, 1900-01 to 1905-06.

The fall in the price of silver made business in imports difficult. Such a fall meant an immediate addition to the rupee price of the goods



which the dealers in most cases were not prepared to pay. Fluctuations in the price of silver had an unsettling effect on the trade for there was no possibility of making a safe calculation. In the eighties this trade was worked so finely that a fall in exchange of even 1% made the difference between a profit and a loss<sup>35</sup>. Importers were helped by an upward tendency of the fluctuations. Conditions in the years 1896-97 and 1897-98 were most unsatisfactory. The most prominent local feature of the trade was tightness of the money market. The credit system of the Marwari traders who were concerned with this trade was well-understood and recognized among merchants, shroffs and bankers in India and up to that time liberal provision had been made to meet the extensive accommodations required for and incidental to the trade. The curtailment of these credits resulted in numerous failures in the bazar. These in their turn caused an uneasy feeling and further restricted credit, importers having to exercise greater caution.<sup>36</sup> By 1898-99 the trade in cotton manufactures began to recover and this was attributable to the increasing prosperity of the people, a steadier exchange and an easier money market.<sup>37</sup> These tendencies continued more or less unchecked till the end of our period. In 1904-05 the trade in Lancashire was as good as it had been during that generation.<sup>38</sup>

In connection with the trade in cotton goods during our period certain new tendencies were discernible. The incipient industrialisation of India naturally had an effect on the composition of foreign trade. In 1877-78 the Collector of Customs commented with some concern on the import of twist and yarn manufactured in Bombay. In 1873-74 these had been under 50,000 lb. In each of the two following years they were under 400,000 lb. while in 1876-77 they mounted upto more than 3½ million and in 1877-78 5½ million lb. Similarly the import of cotton piece goods from Bombay also multiplied fifteen-fold during five years ending 1877-78. It was officially remarked that Bombay-made cloths like the Bombay yarn were displacing in many quarters imported Lancashire goods.<sup>39</sup> It was hoped that with the removal of duty on coarse cloths Manchester would make a last effort to recover the trade which it had lately lost by the introduction of the Bombay-made cloths.<sup>40</sup>

The importation of cotton goods of Indian manufacture to the Bengal market, however, continued unabated. In 1890-91 the importation from Bombay increased by 33½% and its value was Rs. 31,79,993.<sup>41</sup> These were encouraged by the exchange troubles of importers from England. Bombay having the same currency as Bengal was free from this disadvantage and so got a pull. In 1892-93 the importations showed a 19% increase. From Madras also there was a heavy importation and piece goods produced in Madras met with favour in Bengal. The competition of Japan and Bombay yarns was also telling on the Lancashire trade.<sup>42</sup> Imports of Indian piece goods again increased in 1898-1900 in sympathy with the general revival of trade. There was a marked increase of exports of Indian piece goods from Calcutta to foreign countries like Germany, Belgium,



Turkey, Zanzibar and Malta. Exports to China practically disappeared owing mainly to the development of weaving industry there. In 1905-06 some Indian piece goods and other manufactures were shipped to the United Kingdom.<sup>43</sup> There was some poetic justice in the export of Indian (though not Bengal) cotton goods to a country which had been responsible for the reversal of a long-run trend of Bengal trade in the early nineteenth century.

Another noteworthy feature of the cotton goods trade was the development of direct importations from Manchester by Indian houses of business. Quite a few such houses emerged into competition with European houses. The Collector of Customs in 1886-87 dwelt on this trend at some length. The piece goods trade had been largely in the hands of European firms only. But for some years previous to 1886-87 a large amount of business was being carried on direct with Manchester by Indian houses. The Collector of Customs, however, made a guess that this kind of trade could not grow beyond a certain limit. As these Indian merchants were far a way from their suppliers, they would naturally be handicapped in settling disputes and they would not have the same choice of selection of goods as a firm having a house in England. Agents could not be expected to perform this business on their behalf as efficiently as British firms.<sup>44</sup>

This direct trade between Manchester and Indian dealers continued till well after the end of our period, although, as the Collector of Customs had forecast, it did not show any signs of expansion large enough to impair the European houses. Among the Indian firms which did business in this line the names of Kerr, Tarruck & Co., S. C. Chunder & Co., and Prawn Kissen Law & Co., deserve special mention.

### THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT

As early as 1872, an Indian commentator, Kissen Mohan Mullick, himself connected with trade, referred to the patriotism of some of his countrymen who sympathised with Bengali spinners and weavers and inveighed against the overwhelming imports of cotton twist and piece goods. They lamented the fact that the spinner's *Churka* had been shelved and the weaver's loom rolled up for ever. Mullick himself did not share this view. On the other hand, he posed the question whether under the most favourable circumstances, it could ever have been within the scope of India's own resources and capability to meet the demands of the absorptive capacity of her growing population of the age at moderate rates. "If our food is dear, our raiment is cheap and that is no small comfort to us generally", Mullick concluded.<sup>45</sup>

But patriotism to which Mullick referred in 1872 gathered strength with time and expressed itself through the *Swadeshi* movement in 1905 and after. It may be of some interest to find out how far this movement with its boycott of foreign goods affected the import trade of piece goods. In



1905-06 the Collector of Customs, while dwelling on the import of piece goods, referred to the *Swadeshi* movement as a disturbing factor which resulted in a futile attempt to boycott all foreign goods, coercion being carried to great lengths. He commented that local production could not compete either in quality or price with Lancashire and the result, in his opinion, was merely a temporary interference with the Puja demand for ready goods in the bazars. On the other hand, he attached more importance to another factor which disturbed the piece goods market. This was the dispute between the importing houses and the Marwari dealers regarding extension of shipments in relation to forward contracts asked for by manufacturers. Business was practically suspended until the dispute was settled.<sup>46</sup> The reduced imports of 1906-07 were explained as the result of the enormous imports of the previous year coupled with the dearness of food stuffs which prevailed in Bengal and the consuming districts outside it. It was officially stated that the boycott agitation in Eastern Bengal might have been responsible in some measure for the fall in imports in the styles consumed in that province but it was believed that dear food was the main factor.<sup>47</sup> The import figures also do not suggest that the import of cotton piece-goods or cotton goods suffered as a result of the *Swadeshi* movement :

TABLE 5  
IMPORT OF PIECE GOODS

Year	Value in Lakhs of rupees
1902-03 ... ..	1500·78
1903-04 ... ..	1443·15
1904-05 ... ..	1714·49
1905-06 ... ..	1938·60
1906-07 ... ..	1701·13
1907-08 ... ..	2167·02

SOURCE : *Report of the Maritime Trade of Bengal 1902-03 to 1907-08.*

The imports in 1907-08 amounted to 1,330½ million yards which was an increase of 15% on that of the preceding year.<sup>48</sup>

The report of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce for 1905 also dealt with the movement and described it as "a more or less unsuccessful boycott of British manufacturers" which temporarily led to an almost complete stoppage of business between the bazar and importing houses thereby causing hardship among the poorer purchasing classes. As both Manchester and Glasgow manufactures were fully booked with orders for months ahead, the inconvenience to the import trade was considerably minimised although advantage was taken of differences which had arisen



between bazar dealers and importing houses in connection with contract terms. In the same report it was mentioned that things were returning to normal.<sup>49</sup>

A. A. Apcar, the President of the Chamber, expressed his sympathy with *Swadeshi* pure and simple. As an Armenian merchant who had made and invested his fortune in Bengal, he welcomed anything that would lead to the normal and material progress of Bengal. But he did not support the boycott and described it as an unfortunate move which had alienated commercial sympathy.<sup>50</sup> *The Economist* commented that the imports of salt and sugar in 1905-06 suffered as a result of the movement although the imports of cigarettes increased by 23·8% on the total of 1904-05<sup>51</sup>.

### SALT

The import of salt for a long time was chiefly from Liverpool. By 1890-91 the steadily increasing introduction of crushed salt in competition with Liverpool salt had become a noteworthy feature of the salt trade. This crushed salt comprised the salt imported from Hamburg which was crushed rock salt, the crushed *kurkut* or sun-evaporated salt sent from Aden by an Italian merchant who had the monopoly there and the *kurkut* which was crushed by permission in the Sulkea salt Golahs.<sup>52</sup>

In the closing years of our period the drop in imports of salt from Liverpool and Hamburg caused some concern. This was attributable to the growing competition of salt in crystals imported from Red Sea ports and salt crushed in Calcutta. This salt was intrinsically cheaper than any European variety. As the process of crushing was inexpensive, it could be placed on the market at considerably below the cost of Liverpool Panga or Hamburg salt. It entered largely into consumption on account of its cheapness. This led to the decline in the import of European salt.<sup>53</sup>

### METALS AND MACHINERY

The import of block tin, patent metals, lead, iron, hardware, cutlery, iron and machinery showed a gradual increase since the beginning of the period under review. The most striking advance was in iron mongery and machinery, the total value of which rose from Sicca Rs. 1,73,449 or Company's Rs. 1,85,012 in 1830-31 to Rs. 1,03,67,213 in 1860-61 but in 1870-71 it fell again to Rs. 92,45,923. The value must have swelled up by the railway iron works and machinery as a sudden rise in it took place in 1855-56, viz., Rs. 1,14,96,515 against Rs. 36,04,970 in 1854-55.<sup>54</sup> It was about the former year that the railway works were in full operation. In 1876-77 metals worth 180 lakhs and machinery worth 30 lakhs were imported<sup>55</sup>. As the pace of industrialisation quickened and the number of jute mills increased, the import of machinery and mill works increased with it.



### MINERAL OIL

The petroleum trade of Calcutta increased from 2,11,516 gallons in 1875-76 to 12,189,679 gallons in 1882-83. Every year the oil was getting into more general use among the local people who were developing new consumption habits. The great bulk of the oil came from the United States, and only a small quantity came direct from England.<sup>56</sup> The increased import of kerosene made the Petroleum Committee of the Calcutta Port Commissioners recommend that the petroleum wharf should be removed to Budge Budge. This recommendation was accepted.<sup>57</sup>

From 1887-88 the threatened competition of Russian oil from Batum commenced and it amounted to 779,675 gallons.<sup>58</sup> The initial prejudice of buyers against the Russian oil disappeared very quickly and for many years there was a keen competition between American and Russian varieties. British oil was used not so much as an illuminant as for lubricating and batching purposes in the mills in Bengal. By 1902-03 imports of both American and Russian oil had fallen off. In that year the Russian oil had fallen by 25·2% and the imports from the United States were less than  $\frac{1}{8}$  of what it had been twelve years ago when 26 million gallons had been imported. This was owing to the rising prices and the increasing competition of the Burma product.<sup>59</sup> In 1903-04 a good quantity of oil was received from Straits Settlements, Borneo and Sumatra.<sup>60</sup>

### MINOR IMPORTS

Besides the principal items of import there were some minor but curious items also to which a brief reference may be made here. The trade in corals which was entirely Italian was an increasing one. The bulk reached Calcutta from Brindisi. The goods, however, were not retained in Calcutta but were purchased for the North West Provinces, Central India and Nepal. They also went to Yarkhand, Kashgar and Straits Settlements and Sumatra.<sup>61</sup> By 1903-04 larger imports of jewellery were indicative of the growing prosperity of the people. Greater scientific research influenced favourably the value in instruments and apparatus.<sup>62</sup> In 1904-05 there was a considerable increase in the import of clocks and watches, toys and carriages. There were 128 motor cars and motor bicycles registered in Calcutta alone. In that year the aggregate trade reached a peak never attained in any previous year.<sup>63</sup>

### MAJOR EXPORTS—INDIGO

The indigo trade was the continuation of an old pattern for many years after 1833. Notwithstanding its vicissitudes its production continued to be a principal industry in Bengal. The indigo rebellion of 1859-60 was followed by a marked decline in the cultivation of the plant throughout Bengal proper. The industry recovered and the contraction of indigo cultivation in Bengal was counter-balanced in the long run by its exten-



sion in Bihar and the North West Provinces and in 1876-77 the total outturn of the country was hardly less, upon an average, than what it had been 30 years before.<sup>64</sup> The export of indigo received a setback with the appearance of the synthetic aniline dye on the market. The following figures give some indication of the development and decline of the indigo trade.

TABLE 6

Year	Value in lakhs of rupees		
1832-33	...	...	1,06·97
1842-43	...	...	1,64·77
1852-53	...	...	1,42·92
1862-63	...	...	1,55·96
1872-73	...	...	2,69·94
1882-83	...	...	3,15·12
1892-93	...	...	2,60·04
1900-1901	...	...	1,56·89

SOURCE: Same as in Table I.

The decline of the indigo trade can be better understood by the volume of trade figures:

TABLE 7

	Annual Average Exports Cwt.	Price per Indian Maund Rs.
1886-87 to 1893-94	... 82,468	235
1894-95 to 1896-9	... 109,182	231
1897-98 to 1900-01	... 70,964	178

The last of the periods coincided with the appearance of the synthetic dye on a commercial scale. As compared with the first period, exports fell by 13·9% and the average price fell by 24·3%. No part of this fall was to be attributed to a difference in the exchange value of the rupee.<sup>65</sup> Although there was a recovery in the next few years, indigo as an article of export had no future.

### JUTE

The place of indigo as Bengal's premier export was taken by jute and tea. In 1872 Kissen Mohun Mullick, reviewing the development of Bengal commerce, remarked that never in his recollection had Bengal trade in any description of goods flourished so well within a few years as jute.<sup>66</sup> The growth of the jute trade is indicated in the following table:



TABLE 8

Year	Exports	
	Average of five years cwt.	
1832-33 to 1836-37	...	11,800
1837-38 to 1841-42	...	67,483
1842-43 to 1846-47	...	111,047
1847-48 to 1851-52	...	234,055
1852-53 to 1856-57	...	439,850
1857-58 to 1861-62	...	710,826
1862-63 to 1866-67	...	969,724
1867-68 to 1871-72	...	2,628,110
1872-73 to 1876-77	...	4,858,162
1877-78 to 1881-82	...	5,362,267
1882-83 to 1886-87	...	7,274,000
1887-88 to 1891-92	...	10,194,000
1892-93 to 1896-97	...	11,183,000
1897-98 to 1901-02	...	12,356,000

The annual exports in the last four years of our period was as follows :

TABLE 9

	cwt. (000's omitted)	
1902-03	...	13,036
1903-04	...	13,721
1904-05	...	12,875
1905-06	...	14,480

### TEA

The growth of the jute trade was matched by that of Indian tea. In 1905-06 tea was the fourth important export item from Calcutta in terms of value. Indian tea had an edge over its competitors because of quality. Indian tea gradually ousted China tea from the Calcutta market. The displacement of China tea by India even in England made itself so perceptible by 1887-88 that the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his budget speech said that it had interfered with the revenue derived from tea in the U.K.<sup>67</sup> Indian tea manufactures adapted themselves to this change in consumer preference. A small quantity of China tea, however, continued to be imported to Calcutta for the use of the Chinese population, the Jews and the Parsees. By 1896-97 only the local Chinamen stuck to Chinese tea. At the turn of the century markets for Indian tea had developed, besides Great Britain, in Australia, New Zealand, United States, Germany, Russia, Canada, Aden, Arabia, Persia, Straits Settlements, Turkey, Egypt and the Cape Colony.<sup>68</sup> The consumption of Indian tea in the United kingdom, Bengal's biggest importer of tea, increased steadily year by year with the exception of slight checks in 1874, '79, '91, '93 and '95.<sup>69</sup> The



following figures indicate the growth and development of the tea trade in Bengal :

TABLE 10

Year		Value Rs.
1841-42	...	1,26,109
1851-52	...	1,98,945
1861-62	...	14,41,900
1871-72	...	1,43,62,138
1881-82	...	3,52,87,713
1891-92	...	5,63,31,095
1901-02	...	7,10,77,000

## COAL

The development of the export trade in coal was an interesting feature of Bengal's foreign trade in the last two decades of the period under survey. The use of country coal on board steamers was increasing. There was no doubt that for bunker use the country coal was supplanting English or other foreign coal. The exports of coal to foreign ports were principally to Ceylon and Aden, both coaling stations for vessels voyaging westwards. The exports to the Straits Settlements also were large as vessels proceeding to Australia and China stopped to coal at Singapore. The opening out of fresh coal fields in the district of Manbhum gave special impetus to the coal trade.<sup>70</sup>

The following table shows the export of coal during the years 1897-98 to 1906-07.

TABLE 11

Year		Exports in tons (000's omitted)
1897-98	...	213
1898-99	...	327
1899-1900	...	304
1900-01	...	542
1901-02	...	525
1902-03	...	432
1903-04	...	493
1904-05	...	594
1905-06	...	837
1906-07	...	940
Average	...	520

Source : Watt, *Commercial Products of India*



Speaking of the foreign trade of Bengal coal, Lord Curzon remarked in 1903 that Indian coal could hardly get beyond Suez on the west or Singapore on the east. At those points it came up against English coal on the one side and Japanese coal on the other. He pointed out, however, that there was a pretty extensive market in between these two points. At the end of our period Bengal coal seemed to be making a most determined effort to capture it.

### COMMERCIAL WORLD OF BENGAL

The dominating interests in the foreign trade of Bengal during the period under review were of course British. The Bengal Chamber of Commerce served them. The commercial organisations generally were anglo-centric in their attitude. The point of interest is that towards the end of our period there was a tendency among certain Indian businessmen to take part in the growing foreign trade. The Indian business community, as the first Report of the Committee of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce for 1887 reveals, became dissatisfied with the inexpansive and undeveloped character of "native commerce". The new generation of merchants were no longer prepared to carry on business according to old systems handed down from generation to generation, confining themselves to the internal trade of the country. They were keen on establishing direct commercial relations with foreign markets. They wanted to develop "unity of action and mutual trust", which, they felt sure, were England's great secrets of success. They also felt inspired by the commercial prosperity of Bombay and the enterprising spirit and energy of the local merchants there. They had a feeling of being left out when they pointed to the fact that "every branch of the import trade and every mill rearing its head in the suburbs", were in the hands of European merchants.<sup>71</sup> They were filled with a pervading sense at once of alienation and of longing.

The establishment of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce in 1887 was the expression of these aspirations of the Indian mercantile community. This Chamber was constituted on a representative basis characterised by a certain *esprit de corps*, mounting self-confidence and optimism. Though Bengalis formed the majority of its original thirty-five members, these included Marwaris, Parsees and non-Bengali Muslims as well.<sup>72</sup>

It is interesting to note that people with diverse racial and communal background played their part in Bengal's commercial life during the period under study. The British and European merchants naturally very much dominated the scene. But representatives of smaller groups and communities also were quite prominent. The firm of Rustomjee Cowasjee (1792-1852) the celebrated Parsee merchant, was a recognized mercantile power in Calcutta especially in the field of China trade. Rustomjee was a big shipowner, having a large fleet of opium clippers. The financial crisis



which ruined so many of the old race of merchant princes in the late forties of the last century, greatly affected his firm. His son Manackjee Rustomjee, however, remained a respected figure of Calcutta's commercial life.<sup>73</sup> Other Parsee merchants like R. D. Mehta were active in Calcutta even at the close of our period. The firm of M. N. Mehta was established in a large way of business with the Far East, especially Japan. It exported Indian produce to Japan and imported Japanese products. In China it had branches in Canton and Hongkong.<sup>74</sup>

D. J. Ezra, a Jewish merchant, established the firm of E. D. Ezra & Company about 1837. As originally founded, the firm devoted its attention to dealings in indigo, opium, hides, gunnies, rice and precious stones. He established trade first with the Persian Gulf and later with the Straits Settlements and China in these commodities. Later on this firm became more interested in real estate.<sup>75</sup>

Though the Armenian merchants in the nineteenth century had lost their former importance in Bengal, quite a few members of this community like Galstaun and Apcar figured prominently in our period. A. A. Apcar of Apcar & Co. was the Chairman of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in 1905. His opinions on the Swadeshi movement have already been examined.

In this connection the name of Hashim Ariff Bros. & Company also deserves mention. This firm was founded in 1861 by Ariff brothers who were the descendants of an Arab family long settled at Rander.<sup>76</sup>

The role of the Bengali merchants during the years 1833-1905 was much more significant than what it became later. Although Ramdulal De, the Bengali merchant prince had died in 1825, his house still flourished till 1868 carried on by his grandsons under the style of Ashootosh De and Nephews. It continued to transact direct with the merchants of Boston, New York and Philadelphia without the interference of any English or American agents. When firms like Palmer & Co. failed during the commercial crisis of 1830, this firm suffered a loss of nearly 25 lakhs of rupees without being seriously affected by it. *The Times* alluded to this describing the sons of Ramdulal as the Rothschilds of Bengal.<sup>77</sup>

The most important Bengali entrepreneur in the opening years of our period was of course Dwarkanath Tagore who established the Carr, Tagore & Company in 1834. In a letter to Bentinck he described this as the first venture "of an open and avowed partnership . . . between the European and the Bengal merchant with the capital of the latter".<sup>78</sup> In point of fact Cowasjee Rustomjee had started a firm in 1827 called Rustomjee Turner & Company which perhaps had a better claim to be described as the pioneer Indo-British business venture.<sup>79</sup> The role of Carr, Tagore & Company which crashed in 1848 was, however, more significant in this respect.

After 1850 there are no more Ram Dulal Dey and Dwarkanath Tagores in Bengal's commercial annals. But the period 1850-1905 nonetheless threw up some remarkable personalities in the field. The rise of a new



class of businessmen was evident. They had benefited by the steadily expanding trade of the period. Mutty Lall Seal (1792-1854), a prince of banians and financial wizard, later launched forth into foreign trade, exporting and importing goods on a very large scale. His favourite imports from England were cotton piece goods, and iron for the assortment of which he had a speciality. He invested a large portion of his capital in ships. At one time he owned about twelve ships of large and small tonnage which were engaged in China as well as European trade. He wanted his sons to take his line of business and established the firm of Oswald, Seal & Company for this purpose. But this experiment was not successful.<sup>80</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century Ram Gopal Ghosh (1815-1868) was another prominent Bengali merchant who, originally a banian to Kelsall & Co., established an independent firm of his own in 1848. His firm had branches in Akyab and Rangoon. In 1854 he took one Mr. Field as a partner but this was for a short time only. In course of his business career Ram Gopal trained up some of the most skilful banians who became very successful in the field.<sup>81</sup>

Most of the famous Bengali merchants of the nineteenth century first began as banians to European mercantile firms. Prawn Kissen Law had served as banian before he started a firm of his own in 1839. The firm of Prawn Kissen Law under the management of Doorga Churn Law added business in general merchandise to the original financial operations and an import and export business grew up. Their main imports were piece goods.<sup>82</sup>

The firm of S. C. Chander & Company was another notable Bengali concern of the period. They were importers of piecegoods as well as jute balers owning their own hydraulic press. The business efficiency of these firms was of a high order and this is indicated by their membership of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

Perhaps the most important Bengali firm of this category was Kerr, Tarruck & Company. Tarruck Chunder Sircar founded this house in 1873 in partnership with James Kerr. Before this he had worked in the office of James Scott & Co. of which he later became a partner, the name of the Company then being changed to Scott, Tarruck & Company. Kerr, Tarruck & Company was established under the auspices of the calico-printers and Turkey red dyers, F. Steiner & Co. whose agency in Calcutta had been under the management of Tarruck Sircar since 1855. James Kerr retired from the firm in 1875 and Tarruck Sircar died in 1888. His sons joined W. B. Jameson and the business was continued in this way till 1904 when Jameson retired. The firm opened a branch in Delhi and sub-offices in Bombay, Karachi, Kanpur and Amritsar. Its chief business was in imports of all kinds of piece-goods, metals, hardware and Java sugar. It was the agent of the Union Assurance Society of London, Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada and Continental Insurance Company of Mannheim. The firm had close business connections with Germany, Belgium and Japan. Around 1905 its annual turnover of business was



about 3 or 4 crores of rupees. This firm enjoyed a unique reputation in the commercial circles of the time, and was treated at par with British firms by the Exchange Banks. Nalin Behari Sircar (1856-1906) a partner of the firm worked as Chairman of the Calcutta Import Trade Association of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in 1904-06. This was indicative of the high esteem in which this firm was held by the European mercantile community.<sup>83</sup> The experiment of Indo-British commercial venture which began with Carr, Tagore and Company reached a new and successful stage with Kerr, Tarruck and Company.

This discussion about Bengali merchants will be incomplete without an explanation of the function of the banian a role which many of the Bengali merchants of the time assumed for themselves. The Bengali banian in the nineteenth century had lost many of the important functions associated with this office in the previous century. He had become a guarantee broker attached to European mercantile firms and covering the bazar risk was his main function. In spite of his restricted sphere of operations, he still exercised considerable influence in the business circles and a few like Mutty Lall Seal were universally recognized and respected for their business acumen and judgement. Many of the noted merchants of the period including Cowasjee Rustomjee had been banians at some stages of their careers. *Banians* or *mut'suddis*, as they sometimes were called, were still a factor to reckon with in the commercial world of Bengal even during the period when Bengali business houses had tended to ossify into zamindari or real estate agencies and the descendants of the great merchant princes had degenerated into a *rentier* class.

By the end of the nineteenth century the Marwaris had established themselves in Calcutta. The firms of Dwarkadass Sewjee & Company, Doolychand Hursookdas and J. Khunneh & Son were members of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in 1905.<sup>84</sup> As early as 1871 Kissen Mohun Mullick referred to the different business methods and standards of Bengali and Marwari merchants. The Bengalis, in his opinion, were more methodical in their business transactions and had gained an independence as a result of their steadiness and economy. Failures of any consequence among them were rare than among those whom he chose to describe as "our red-turbaned friends".<sup>85</sup> The rivalry between the Marwari and Bengali merchants hinted at by Mullick probably became more pronounced as the Marwaris improved their position in business. The establishment of their separate commercial associations was probably its ultimate result. They had not yet acquired the importance which the next age was to bring to them.

## II FRONTIER TRADE

The frontier trade between Bengal and provinces beyond British India like Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan was entirely by land and carried on by carts and pack-bullocks and occasionally by porters. Only timber was floated down the rivers.



Among the most important items of exports from Bengal into Nepal were European piece-goods, cotton and salt. Indian piece-goods also were sent. Other items of export included refined sugar, brass and copper. Among the articles imported into Bengal from Nepal were cattle, grain and pulses, other spring crops, rice, paddy, linseed, mustard seed and timber.<sup>86</sup>

The European cloth was in favour with the more well-to-do people who lived in or near Nepal's capital. They imported for their own consumption and also re-exported a moderate amount to Lhasa in Tibet. The raw cotton was woven by the labouring classes into a durable coarse cloth. The whole trade may be said to have been with Kathmandu where the consuming classes, viz., the Court, the army and all the high-paid officers lived. There was a long established mercantile connection with Tibet.<sup>87</sup>

Next in importance was the trade with Sikkim, and Bengal's trade with Bhutan was not much in terms of value. This frontier trade, however, went on increasing slowly during the period under survey :

TABLE 12

TOTAL TRADE WITH NEPAL, SIKKIM, BHUTAN FROM 1886-87 (TRADE WITH SIKKIM INCLUDES THAT WITH TIBET)  
ANNUAL AVERAGE

Quinquennium	Rs.	Increase or Decrease %
1876-77 to 1880-81	1,43,80,267	
1881-82 to 1885-86	1,44,38,285	+ 0·4%
1886-87 to 1890-91	1,91,20,693	+ 32·4%
1891-92 to 1895-96	2,20,47,892	+ 15·3%
1896-97 to 1900-01	2,95,31,478	+ 33·9%
1901-02 to 1905-06	2,86,37,008	- 3·1%

SOURCES : *Reports on the Internal Trade of Bengal 1876-77 to 1879-80.*  
*Reports on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan 1880-81 to 1905-06.*

Except with Nepal the trade was insignificant. In 1900-01 this constituted about 92% of the whole trade carried across the frontiers of Bengal. The bulk of the imports even at the end of the period under review consisted of agricultural and pastoral products and trade fluctuated from seasonal causes. More than half the imports from Nepal were food grains from the fertile tracts in and near the Terai which were tapped by the railway. Other imports included cotton, hides and skins, provisions and oil seeds. The cultivation of jute in Nepal was increasing. Cotton goods constituted 41% of the total exports from Bengal to Nepal.



Other items were metals, kerosene, provisions, salt and sugar. The imports from Sikkim in 1903-04 were chiefly fruits, nuts, vegetables, and cereals, and cotton goods and salt were the main exports. The trade with Bhutan mostly concerned timber.<sup>44</sup>

The merchants and manufacturers of England in the late nineteenth century looked longingly upon Tibet as a potential market. They formed a continuously active pressure group on Indian policy. The Director of Statistics in 1900-01 regretted that up to that time British commercial intercourse with Tibet was still of the slightest. He referred to the aversion of the Tibetan authorities to the development of trade with India and their selection as a mart of Yatung which did not enjoy the conditions of an efficient market. Tibet in the opening year of the present century presented a practically closed door to the Indian trader, at least in that portion of the country which was reached from Darjeeling.<sup>45</sup>

The main imports from Tibet were raw wool (more than 80% of the total), musk, yaks' tails, skins and animals. From Bengal the Tibetans took cotton goods (Indian piece-goods), silk, metals, precious stones, glass and coral ornaments and tobacco. It was officially stated that transport difficulties and trading monopolies enjoyed by the lamas were the main obstacles in the development of trade. This accounted for the exclusion of Indian tea. It was officially noted in 1903-04 that despite the apparent poverty of the country, Tibet's resources could probably be developed by commercial exploitation. Viewed in this context, the despatch of the British Mission to Tibet in 1904 takes on a new significance. For the time being the trade with Tibet came to a stand-still. This partly explains the decline during the last five years of our period (1901-02 to 1904-05). Military operations resulting from the armed opposition to the Mission led to the closure of the trade route. The Tibetan Government also banned all trade with British India by an edict of 15th October, 1903. The trade, however, was resumed after the Treaty of Lahsa and in 1904-05 there was a 53½% increase.<sup>46</sup> It was hoped that when the terms of the Treaty were more fully understood there would be a much larger development of trade.

One interesting feature of Bengal's trade with the Himalayan countries was that there was a continued tendency of total imports exceeding total exports. During the last four years the imports went on increasing while exports remained stationary. In 1905-06 the imports from Nepal more than doubled the exports and the case of Bhutan was seven times as great. The decline in the last quinquennium would have been more but the actual decline was disguised by a considerable rise in value.

### III THE COASTING TRADE

The coasting trade was extremely important during the pre-railway period not only in the exchange of local products between Calcutta and other Indian ports but also in the distribution of imports. The coasting



trade of Calcutta, Bengal's chief port, was, on the one hand, with the subordinate ports of Chittagong and the ports of Balasore, Cuttack and Puri in Orissa and on the other, with other British Indian ports like Madras and Bombay and Indian ports, not British, in other Presidencies. There were many such ports on the Coromandel and Malabar coasts. The trade with British Burma also was regarded as coasting trade. From the year 1860-61 onwards detailed information about Bengal's coasting trade is available. This explains the phenomenal increase of the total trade for the quinquennium 1860-61 to 1864-65, in the accompanying table which otherwise may seem to be rather perplexing. Imports had always been greater in variety than exports. With the increasing diversity of sectional production the tonnage of coasting vessels grew rapidly. In 1877-78 raw caoutchouc came from Chittagong and Rangoon. Coffee and coir manufactures came from Madras. Bombay supplied raw cotton, cotton twist and yarn and cotton piece-goods ; fruit came from Madras and Travancore. Burma was an important source of grain and pulse. Hides and skins and vegetable oil were imported from Madras. Lac came from British Burma. Both Bombay and Madras sent salt to Bengal. Oil seeds came from Madras and spices like cardamoms from Madras and Travancore. Chittagong supplied tea until direct exports from that port grew in volume. Tobacco and cigars came from Coconada and timber and wool manufactures from British Burma. The import of mineral oil or kerosene was entirely from Rangoon. This amounted to 112929 gallons valued at Rs. 105,546 in 1876-77 as against Rs. 6260 and Rs. 41,914 in 1874-75 and 1875-76 respectively. Rangoon oil had entered into brisk competition with American oil.<sup>81</sup> Rice, hides, stick lac and tobacco were brought from the Orissa ports.

The import of Bombay textiles and twist and yarn was another remarkable feature of the coasting trade since the seventies of the last century. In spite of the remissions that were granted to the foreign product on the grounds that the cotton duties were protective, Bombay products continued to find a large and extending market in Bengal.<sup>82</sup>

Bombay and Madras were the chief contributors towards the imports in 1885-86. The receipts from each of these Presidencies were about double those from British Burma and the outports of Bengal. The exports from Calcutta were principally to British Burma and the outports of Bengal.<sup>83</sup>

Important exports from Calcutta consisted mainly of raw products of which grain, jute manufactures, cotton twist, spices, raw silk, tobacco, raw jute, coral, apparel, provisions, flour, seeds, hides and skins, fruits, silk piece-goods, tea and sugar were the chief. Exports of foreign merchandise included cotton manufactures, metals, apparel, cotton twist, salt, kerosene oil, wool manufactures, liquors and hardware.<sup>84</sup>

From 1890 onwards, the export of coal became a remarkable feature of Bengal's coasting trade as well as of the foreign trade. In 1891-92, the



amount of coal exported to coast ports was 105,739 tons. This rose to 122,879 tons in the following year. Nearly the whole of the coal shipped to coast ports went to the Madras Presidency and Burma.<sup>95</sup>

Little alteration in the structure of Bengal's coasting trade occurred during the entire period between 1833 and 1905 except that jute and jute manufactures, tea and coal gradually bulked large in its exports and mineral oil in its imports as these industries developed.

The interportal commerce of Bengal was adversely affected by extensions of railway communications especially to Bengal outports and also by the development of direct steamship communication between other Indian and foreign ports by 1900.<sup>96</sup> The position of Chittagong was influenced by the opening of the Assam-Bengal Railway. The trade of Chittagong began to expand steadily after this. The general increase in the import trade was due to the great number of tea gardens which fed this railway not only by the export of tea but also by the receipt of all garden stores.<sup>97</sup> The decline of Calcutta's coasting trade to which these factors contributed was, however, checked in 1903-04. There was a revival in the trade. Burma with her oil trade became the chief agent in swelling the imports into Calcutta. Madras and Burma absorbed the bulk of Calcutta's export trade of Indian produce.<sup>98</sup> There was a demand for Bengal coal in Sind. The coasting trade also shared in the record aggregate trade in 1904-05 which was a remarkably prosperous year. This again was made possible by imports of kerosene oil from Burma and exports of jute manufactures to that country from Calcutta.<sup>99</sup>

As regards shipping employed in the coasting trade, the vessels really engaged in the foreign trade were shown in official returns as employed in the coasting trade if they touched another Indian port before coming to or leaving the port of Calcutta. The tendency of steamers to displace sailing ships was observable in the coasting trade even as in foreign trade. At the end of the period, British, French, German, Italian, American and Turkish vessels were engaged in the foreign and coasting trade of Bengal. Moreover, a large number of country boats were employed in the coasting or interportal commerce. Like foreign trade the coasting trade, however, was mainly in British hands.

The following table traces the growth and development of Bengal's coasting trade during the period 1830-31 to 1904-05. It will be observed that vicissitudes of this trade were greater than Bengal's foreign commerce. It was more immediately affected by such factors as famine and drought and local commercial crises. The startling increase of total trade during the five year period ending 1864-65 is explained by a different source giving fuller and more detailed information not available for earlier periods. The slow rate of growth of the total trade during the last four quinquenniums was probably due to the competition from the railways. By 1905 the coasting trade had lost the importance it had enjoyed at the beginning of the period.



TABLE 13

The Coasting Trade of Bengal (Values in Lakhs of Rupees and Decimals of a Lakh).

Quinquennium	Imports	Exports	Total	Increase or decrease per cent
1830-31 to 1834-35	14.76	35.70	50.46	—
1835-36 to 1839-40	26.44	39.03	65.47	+ 29.7
1840-41 to 1844-45	30.69	27.85	58.55	— 10.5
1845-46 to 1849-50	36.10	34.81	70.91	+ 21.1
1850-51 to 1854-55	31.71	52.13	83.84	+ 18.2
1855-56 to 1859-60	47.23	89.16	136.40	+ 62.6
1860-61 to 1864-65	176.04	507.57	683.62	+402.2
1865-66 to 1869-70	186.54	623.85	810.40	+ 18.5
1870-71 to 1874-75	179.96	464.30	644.27	— 20.4
1875-76 to 1879-80	234.03	770.16	1004.20	+ 55.9
1880-81 to 1884-85	293.19	467.04	760.23	— 24.3
1885-86 to 1889-90	319.30	534.80	854.10	+ 12.3
1890-91 to 1894-95	370.89	577.40	948.29	+ 11
1895-96 to 1899-1900	488.99	644.02	1133.01	+ 19.5
1900-01 to 1904-05	562.50	731.51	1294.01	+ 14.2

Sources : As in Table I.

#### IV INTERNAL TRADE

The history of the internal trade of Bengal from 1833 to 1905 was one of the opening of a vast market ready to supply raw materials and to absorb the finished products of the British and other European manufactures. The process was facilitated by the virtual extinction of indigenous industries early in the 19th century. So far as production was concerned, Bengal was cut up into a large number of heterogeneous economic units—a situation that did not accord with the growing English manufacturing interests and the doctrine of free trade which was the prevailing economic philosophy of the age. In order to remove these difficulties the Company's government attempted a number of reforms which changed the character of the internal trade of Bengal.

This trade in the 19th century was still burdened with vexatious transit duties which were a legacy of the preceding century. When the East India Company became the real rulers of Bengal in 1765, they did not relieve the internal trade of the region from those duties which were a great impediment to the trade. The duties brought some revenue and the Company was not ready to forego even a fraction of its revenue from inland duties for the benefit of the domestic trade of the Province.<sup>100</sup>

Fortunately the policy of the Company was changed by some of its own servants in what has been called the age of reform.<sup>101</sup> Lord Bentinck instructed Sir Charles Trevelyan to make an inquiry and submit a report



on Transit Duties. In his celebrated Report on the Town and Transit Duties (1834), Trevelyan, well-known for his liberal even radical views, very ably unmasked the evils of the existing system. The paper revealed that the evils had grown under British rule as compared with the state of affairs under the Nawabs of Bengal. It was shown that traders all over the country were subjected to delay and all kinds of exactions. The Report described how manufactures were ruined and internal trade hamstrung by the rapacity of customs officers who were paid so low that they had to live only by extortion. Travellers were harassed and it was revealed that the huge machinery of oppression after all was maintained in the country for the sake of an insignificant revenue.<sup>102</sup> This Report was published at the instance of Lord William Bentinck. In England Lord Ellenborough eloquently criticized the evils of the system and advocated its abolition. But the Court of Directors was not yet prepared to take this extreme step. While recognizing the "injurious effects" of the transit duties on internal trade, it thought it would be "premature and inexpedient" to give peremptory instructions on such a subject to the Local Government.<sup>103</sup>

The publication of the Trevelyan report in which the complete abolition of the town and transit duties had been recommended, however, created a great stir in the administrative circles in India. Even after the departure of Bentinck from the Indian scene, the reforming enthusiasm was not quite spent. Ross, acting as Governor of the Agra Presidency, abolished the transit duties in the Upper Provinces on his own responsibility. Ross's action forced the Supreme Government to follow suit in the Lower Provinces by abolishing all the Customs Houses in Bengal on March 1, 1836 and the Town Duties on May 1, 1836. These measures called down the displeasure of the Home Authorities who were not ready to acquiesce in such unilateral action in the cause of reform.<sup>104</sup>

Freed at last from the oppressive duties the domestic trade of Bengal began to show signs of growth. This new flow of trade was greatly stimulated by improved communications. The development of communications by means of railways, steamships, canals, telegraphs and cables which revolutionized Bengal trade mostly took place after 1858. The large volume of foreign trade encouraged a corresponding extension of inland trade. This again was facilitated by the era of peace which followed the uprising of 1857. Return of conditions to normal was slow and gradual. However, by the early 1860's there was a perceptible increase in trading and business activity. Conditions were propitious for the emergence of the banking industry in the interior for the proper development of internal trade. In 1865 a group of Europeans started a bank in Allahabad with its Head Office in that town. They felt the necessity of such a Bank as would not be controlled by a condescending and patronising Head Office in Calcutta.<sup>105</sup> Events such as this point to the growth of Bengal's internal trade though reliable statistics are available only from a later date.

Unlike the sea-borne trade of Bengal, the registration of the internal trade of the province was not properly recorded till the early seventies.



Progress was first made in the registration of internal traffic when, at the instance of Sir George Campbell, the Lt.-Governor of Bengal, a station was established at Sahebgunge with the object of registering the Ganges-borne trade between Eastern and Northern Bengal on the one hand, and the districts of Bihar and the North-Western Provinces on the other. In September, 1875 the extension of the system throughout the whole of Bengal was sanctioned. It is only from April 1, 1876 that the figures were collected and tabled more or less systematically.<sup>106</sup>

### THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Nowhere in India was internal traffic more active than in Bengal when the rivers were full of water. Then every river was turned into a highway for the country craft laden with merchandise, every stream into a pathway and every creek into a harbour for boats. There was comparative stagnation in internal communication during the dry season when the lesser rivers were not navigable.<sup>107</sup>

The main river routes of the region were the rivers of the Ganges, proceeding from the North-West and of the Brahmaputra, from the North-East, meeting in the delta of Bengal. Almost all the other rivers of Bengal were feeders or distributaries of these two main lines of communication.

The tract known as north Bengal extended from the Mahananda on the west of the Brahmaputra on the east and from the Teesta on the north-east to the Ganges on the south-west. The Nadia rivers was a general name for the extensive network of streams of which the Bhagirathi, the Jelanghi and the Mathabhanga were the principal channels. The largest rivers of East Bengal were the Jamuna and Meghna, both offshoots from the Brahmaputra. The whole of East Bengal was a network of river communication affording unrivalled facilities for the carriage of merchandise. The river trade routes of West Bengal had little or no connection with the main system of the country.

From the three frontier northern sub-divisions of north Bihar, there were two great currents of export trade, the one making south-west and the other south-east towards the Ganges. The second current of export trade from Bihar was southwards in the first instance to the Ganges or to the marts situated on the larger affluents of the Ganges.

The three Orissa rivers, the Subarnarekha, the Baitarani and the Mahanadi were great channels of trade in that region.<sup>108</sup> The great bulk of the traffic with Assam was conveyed by river routes. In 1905 river-borne trade from Assam valley went chiefly by steamer; but in the Surma valley and especially in Sylhet country boats were largely employed.

Although river routes were very important for the trade of Bengal, the coming of the railway age greatly changed the transportation system. In 1872 there were less than 900 miles of railway in the whole of Bengal. During the next nine years 407 miles were constructed. The total length



of the railway lines completed during the decade 1881-91 was 1,051 miles. By 1901 no less than 1,614 miles of railway were opened linking up important trade centres with the existing railway system.<sup>109</sup>

In 1901 there were nearly 40,000 miles of roads in Bengal. This worked out as one mile of road to every four miles of area.<sup>110</sup>

With better transportation domestic trade of Bengal grew fast during the period under survey. More and more farmers were able to send a surplus of some kind to market and buy in return the goods distributed by wholesalers and retailers.

During the greater part of the period domestic trade was still at the periodic stage and the bulk of commercial business was transacted through these weekly or bi-weekly marts and annual or bi-annual fairs. The weekly market or *hat* was a centre of local trade and a place where producers and consumers came into direct contact. The intervention of middlemen was rarely required. Scattered in the interior of Bengal were large marts or trade centres. These were the foci of the import and export trade of the neighbouring regions. The original germ from which all trade sprang was the bazar, market or *hat* held once or twice during the week to which the neighbouring villagers brought their surplus produce for sale. The rise of shop-keeping affected the organisation of this weekly market. Round this market-place a few permanent shops gradually sprang up and if its site was a convenient centre for the collection and distribution of commodities these shops would increase in number. Ultimately these marts would become the feeders and distributaries of Calcutta commerce. Dacca and Naraingunge, for example, each had a trade of more than a million sterling in value. The physical appearance of these trading centres could be very misleading. With the exception of Dacca and Naraingunge none of these places gave any indication of their real importance. There were no outward signs of wealth and nothing to suggest that the dirty looking untidy East Bengal village mart had a trade worth many lakhs of rupees a year and that not a few of the inhabitants of the village were wealthy men.

The rise of jute trade had a far-reaching influence on the domestic trade of Bengal and a reference must be made in passing to its mechanism. This trade began to assume importance about 1867 and many trading centres grew up or came into prominence in consequence. The jute trade made Naraingunge what it became in 1905.

The organisation of the jute trade only the barest outline of which can be given here was rather complex. It was a blending of old and new forms of business and many middlemen intervened between the cultivator of jute and the shipper. The cultivator generally sold to a petty trader or *farriah* who visited the villages and markets with a boat. The *farriah* again sold to a *bepari* who dealt direct with the jute merchant at Naringunge or through an *aratdar* or broker who had advanced him money. The *beparis* were usually Muslims and the *aratdars* Hindus. The



jute growers did not as a rule take advances on their crop and they generally received only about 8 as. less than the amount actually paid by the Naraingunge merchants. The *araldar* or *mahajan* sold to the big buyer who might be the representative of a large exporting firm or of a mill, a baler or another broker, by whom the preliminary sorting, grading and bulking were effected.

In addition to purchasing at Naraingunge, merchants had buyers at all the important moffussil centres and from July onwards their tugs were to be seen puffing up and down the rivers towing after them six or seven huge country boats, laden with cargoes of the 'golden fibre'. During the busy season, the boats of the traders were to be found on every river and stream and at every mart and bazar, and the whole country-side was full of excited activity.<sup>111</sup>

Goalando was the immediate centre of the trade of Pabna, Mymensingh and Dacca districts. The Serajgunge mart in Pabna was a very important centre of trade. It was fed with jute, oil-seeds, tobacco, its three staples of export, by the numerous small bazars situated up-stream on the banks of the Jamuna (Brahmaputra) and the Teesta, in the districts of Pabna, Mymensingh, Bogra, Goalpara, Coochbihar and Jalpaiguri. This country produce was bought from the ryots at the local markets by petty dealers and was brought down by them in small boats of 80 to 300 maunds burden. At Serajgunge the produce was bought up by traders in direct communication with Calcutta. It was then transferred to large boats of 500 maunds burden and upwards or to the steamers which plied between Calcutta and Goalando. On the return journey these boats and steamers bought up salt, piece-goods, iron and brassware. At Serajgunge these were transhipped to the small boats and sent up-stream in exchange for jute, seeds and tobacco. It is interesting to note that the balance of this trade was generally in favour of Serajgunge as against Calcutta and it had to be adjusted by the import of silver. In Nadia, Kushtia was an important mart. In West Bengal the marts of Katwa, Kalna, Nadunghat and Bhadreswar were of considerable importance. The importance of Katwa and Kalna, formerly regarded as the ports of the Burdwan district, declined as a result of the opening of the East Indian Railway and the silting up of the Bhagirathi. Ranigunge, Asansol and Burdwan became the new centres to trade owing their rise to the development of the mining industry.

Outside Bengal proper, Patna was the largest of mercantile centres. It was an emporium of trade where merchandise was attracted less for consumption than for reconsignment and reshipment. Patna's trade gradually declined owing to the reduced freight charged by the railways on goods booked direct to Calcutta. The great mart of Revelgunge in Sarun discharged much the same functions for up-country produce as Serajgunge accomplished for the surplus produce of Rangpore, Bogra and Mymensingh.<sup>112</sup>



### FAIRS

The internal trade of Bengal was encouraged by periodic commercial fairs that were held in different parts of the province. As distinguished from the *hat*, the fair was a gathering of dealers mainly. It often lasted for several weeks. In contrast to the *hat*, it was a centre of national and even international trade. The goods dealt in had often travelled long distances and were necessarily those which had high value in proportion to their bulk. For example, the Baruni Mela of Munshigunge on the banks of the Dhaleswari in the Dacca district was held in October or November and it attracted dealers from Amritsar and Delhi and Maghs from Arakan who brought catechu and other commodities for sale. Bamboos were brought from Sylhet and wood from the Sundarbans. Nearly all goods of European and Indian manufacture which were in general demand could be obtained at this fair. From the account of the Munshigunge fair it is not difficult to see how the consumers in rural areas periodically obtained their supply of the articles they wanted especially before the introduction of river steamers.<sup>113</sup> These fairs lost their original importance very rapidly as steam navigation penetrated into the remoter parts of the country.

### MERCHANTS, TRADING AND FORWARDING AGENTS

As local markets grew, merchants and trading agents appeared in different centres of commerce. In Goalando, for example, the Marwaris or Kayas as they were called, had firmly established themselves as principal merchants and forwarding agents by 1876. Among them the biggest and most influential trader was Rai Bahadur Maha Sing Megraj of Murshidabad who had agents at every place of importance up the Brahmaputra as far as and beyond Dibrugarh. The business of Bengali merchants who numbered about 30, was chiefly local.

As an example of the important role of the Jain merchants of Azimgunge in the internal trade of Bengal the case of the Dudhoria family was perhaps typical. The settlement of this family in Bengal dates from 1774 when Harji Mal Dudhoria migrated from Bikanir to Azimgunge. They started as dealers in indigenous cloth. Gradually this business attained extensive proportions and in addition a money-lending agency was opened with branches at Calcutta, Azimgunge, Jangipore and Mymensingh. By 1877 these banking and money-lending concerns attained great proportions.<sup>114</sup> Later on this family came to own vast landed estates.

In East Bengal the Roys or Kundus of Bhagyakul were very prominent in the field of domestic trade. They owned and carried on many mercantile and banking businesses in that region. They also established the important mercantile and banking firm in Calcutta in the name of Prem Chand Roy. They also established a steamer service plying between Calcutta and Dacca.<sup>115</sup>

Throughout East and North Bengal which was the richest part of



the province the internal trade was in the hands of the various trading castes like the Sahas and Tilis. Only in places like Dacca which were old metropolitan centres trade was not confined to any particular community or caste. Europeans, Armenians, Muhammedans and Hindus were all engaged in it. Among the Hindus Basaks, Sahas and Tilis figured most prominently. By the end of the period under survey the Marwaris had firmly established themselves in these trading centres. It is interesting to notice that the brokers or middlemen generally were Muhammedans or Namasudras.

In the Bihar districts trade was generally controlled by various local Baniya castes. In the towns and larger villages the ubiquitous presence of the Marwari trader could not fail to attract notice. In the Santal Parganas domestic trade was exclusively in the hands of traders from Bihar and Marwari merchants. Barter was a common form of trading in Palamau and afforded great opportunities for profit to the middlemen. In Manbhum the greater part of the trade was carried on by Marwaris and Gandhabaniks.

The pattern was more or less the same in the Orissa districts. The local trade in Cuttack was in the hands of Baniya, Teli, Kewat, Guria, Pattra and Gola castes. In Puri alone Brahmins participated in it.

In Assam, the trading classes differed in Assam and Surma valleys. In the former a considerable share of the export trade in mustard was in the hands of a class of traders who were natives of the Kamrup district. But almost all the rest of the export traffic and nearly the whole of the import traffic of the valley were carried on by Marwaris usually known as Kayas. There was a few Bengali Muhammedans in the larger towns but the Kayas monopolized the banking and wholesale business of the valley. Their shops were to be found not only in the business centres, but on every tea garden and on the paths by which hillmen brought down their cotton, rubber, lac and other products. The Assamese had allowed the whole profits of trade to pass into the hands of outsiders. In Surma valley the conditions were different. The native population contained a large trading element and merchants from Dacca were more numerous than in Assam proper. A fair number of Marwaris were found but they in no sense dominated the trade of the valley.

A brief reference must be made here to the trade of the hill people of Assam. Except among the Khasis and some of the Naga tribes, few hillmen entirely depended upon trade for their livelihood. Most tribes, however, grew articles like cotton, chillies and lac for export. They brought these to the markets at the foot of the hills where they exchanged them for rice, salt, dried fish, cloth and petty oilman's stores. Even at the end of the period under review the trade was largely carried on by barter. The Khasis and some of the Naga tribes were keen and energetic traders and occasionally they went as far afield as Calcutta in search of goods.

The rise of the tea industry had a very decentralizing effect upon



the internal commerce of Assam. In the result many of the old permanent centres of trade in the Assam Valley as well as in the Surma Valley lost their importance.<sup>116</sup>

In the trade of Bengal districts also the role of outsiders was quite important. The people of Buckergunge, the greatest rice-exporting district, took little or no interest in the extensive rice trade of the district with Calcutta and other places. From December to March the trade was mostly in the hands of independent travelling agents who bought the rice at the *hats* and carried it to Calcutta. During the same months *mahajans* or merchants bought as much as they could and stored it in warehouses and when in April, the travelling agents left the field, they began to export in large quantities until October. The natives of the district were content with merely growing the rice and only a few were enterprising enough to become *fartiahs* or petty dealers. The profits of carriage and exchange were for the most part appropriated by strangers. The carrying trade was chiefly in the hands of people from Faridpur and Dacca and all the *dalals* or brokers came from Sylhet and Tripura. The Hindus more than Muslims and among the Hindus the Sahas were the chief and most successful traders.<sup>117</sup>

From Patna the most valuable article of export was oil-seeds. The trade was in the hands of about a dozen merchants. Two European agencies, Ralli Brothers and N. I. Valetta & Co. exported more than half of 12,73,900 maunds by rail. These two were the principal European trading firms in Revelgunge also. The Bengali traders in this place bought oil-seeds when prices were low and stored them and despatched them uncleaned direct to Calcutta. Unlike the European companies the Indian traders did not insure. They drew bills on their bankers who accepted them and thus became practically insurers.

The trade in oil-seeds in Champaran was carried on principally by Bengali firms in Calcutta who had representatives settled in the district for years. The trade of Bhagalpore and Purnea was in the hands of Bengalis, particularly of Calcutta. There were some up-country traders also but their number was proportionately small.<sup>118</sup> By 1905, however, Marwaris had established themselves even in these places largely ousting older competitors.

As the domestic trade grew, the number of people engaged in trade and commerce grew with it. In 1872 people belonging to the merchant and trading classes in Bengal numbered nearly a million and quarter.<sup>119</sup> In 1881 there were 1,136,014 males and 195,423 females whose occupations were classed as commercial.<sup>120</sup> Ten years later it was reckoned that the general shop-keepers numbered 490,887 and the general merchants 345,340 and the piece-goods dealers 262,679. Bankers and money-lenders totalling 113,206 took a prominent place in the system and they were to be found in every village of any size. They combined the business of pawn-broker with their loan operations. The number of merchants and shop-keepers' clerks was less than 75,000. This shows how few mercantile firms and



shops were large enough to give employment to more than actual owners. Amongst persons employed in transport and storage the five large groups were formed by boatmen, palanquin-bearers, cartmen, pack-bullock drivers and general messengers.<sup>121</sup>

The Census of 1901 revealed that the number of bankers and money-lenders rose to 152,000. It is interesting to note that the money-lender was often a piece-goods dealer or a general merchant and he usually also traded in grain.<sup>122</sup> The demarcation between trade and finance was never very sharp in Bengal and a large number of individuals and firms combined both functions. Throughout the period the piece-goods dealer continued to be the typical retail distributor. Outside the cities and big centres of trade the village store which kept and sold provisions, goods and commodities was very important. In rural areas the store was a social centre. It also supplied news-papers to their limited subscribers and perhaps books. The proprietor occasionally went to town to buy and brought back ideas about the world. It is needless to say that business methods were primitive, simple and almost changeless. There were no systematic methods of book-keeping and taking inventory was almost unknown.

In spite of the extension of railway communications by 1901, considerable number of people in the transport and storage business were still employed as boatmen, palanquin-bearers, cart owners and drivers. Their number, however, was less than in 1891.<sup>123</sup>

Making all allowances for the errors in compilation of the first four census reports and the confusion resulting from their different methods of classifying occupation, it can be asserted that the number of persons engaged in the domestic trade of Bengal went on increasing during the period under survey. In 1881 it was found that the members of the commercial class were most numerous in the Presidency Division as was only natural. Next to that was the Dacca Division owing partly to the large number of traders attracted to its great riverside marts for jute and rice. In no other Division were they 50% of the total employed, being completely out-numbered by the agriculturists and artisans.<sup>124</sup>

#### CALCUTTA TRADE THE TRADE OF THE PROVINCE

The entire trade of the Province of Bengal either converged to or diverged from Calcutta. The trade of the Chittagong port was of course distinct as was the comparatively insignificant trade of the Orissa ports. These did not affect the general position that the Calcutta trade was the measure of the Bengal trade. It was stated in the Report on the Internal Trade of Bengal, 1878-79 that "the trade of the metropolis is a true and sufficient index to the trade of the province".<sup>125</sup>

In 1876-77 the staples of this traffic were rice and paddy, wheat, pulses and grain, different kinds of food grains, jute, oil-seeds, indigo, tea, silk, sugar, tobacco, raw cotton, hides, saltpetre, European piece-goods, cotton



twist and salt. All the staples with the exception of salt and cotton piece-goods were imported into Calcutta. Salt, almost entirely derived from Liverpool, and English piece-goods were exported from Calcutta and so distributed in the interior of the country.<sup>126</sup>

In 1900-01, the imports into Calcutta, in the main, consisted of food-grains and other articles required either for export overseas or for the supply of local factories or raw materials needed for both purposes like jute, coal and cotton supplemented by food stuffs needed for the sustenance of a population which was about one million. The exports from Calcutta consisted of articles imported from foreign countries for distribution throughout north-east India or made in the local factories, gunny bags being prominent in this group. The articles imported into Calcutta in the order of their importance were raw jute, grain (mainly rice) and pulse, tea, oil seeds, chiefly linseed and rape seed, coal, fruit and vegetables (fresh and provisions), hides and skins, indigo, raw cotton, metals, viz, brassware and copper ware (for local use), lac, raw silk, hay and straw for local use. Principal exports from Calcutta into the interior in the order of their importance in the trade were cotton piece-goods, salt, metals and metalwares chiefly iron and steel, with brass and copper, grain (chiefly rice) and pulse, sugar, railway material, cotton yarn, vegetable oils, chiefly mustard and cocoanut, gunny bags and cloth, spices, apparel and mineral oil or kerosene.<sup>127</sup>

The weight carried by rail represented 64·6% of the whole and of the trade of Calcutta with the country about  $\frac{2}{3}$  were ordinarily carried by rail in the opening years of the present century. The portion of the trade which was carried by boat was about a fifth and the steamer trade was under a tenth of the trade. The trade carried by road was still smaller, being little more than 6% of the whole. A noteworthy feature of the inland trade was that the trade which was moved by steam whether—rail or river steamer—was progressive in its nature, while the trade carried otherwise did not appear to grow in the same manner. It was obvious, however, that there would always be a considerable boat traffic in the region covered by the network of waterways which formed such a conspicuous physical feature of the province.<sup>128</sup>

In 1905-06 the chief items of export from Calcutta into Bengal and other provinces were piece-goods, mostly European, metals and manufactures of metal, sugar, salt, cotton twists and yarns, railway plant and rolling stock, oils, spices, gunny bags and cloth. The principal items of import into Calcutta from Bengal and other provinces were raw jute, coal and coke, rice, tea, hides and skins, opium, lac, gunny bags, oilseeds, wheat and linseed.<sup>129</sup>

Since the largest proportion of the internal trade of Bengal had Calcutta for its origin or destination some idea of the growth of the trade can be formed from the figures relating Table 13 to the trade of the metropolis :



	Imports into Calcutta Rs.	Exports from Calcutta Rs.
1876-77	... 26,69,85,045	19,45,53,465
1880-81	... 45,64,92,035	27,09,26,828
1885-86	... 63,51,22,714	26,30,27,430
1890-91	... 45,45,86,185	29,85,45,266
1894-95	... 57,24,33,933	30,13,96,145
1900-01	... 63,69,65,159	41,90,36,809
1904-05	... 73,61,02,090	48,56,47,533. <sup>130</sup>

Of the foreign import trade of Calcutta, as reported by the Collector of Customs in 1881-82, cotton piece-goods led the list and formed 62% of the total. This trade depended on several factors. During the periods of prosperity it was natural to assume that the capacity to purchase articles of clothing would increase and that there would be a tendency also to invest further and to indulge in the finer varieties which might be called luxuries. One index of general prosperity naturally was the large crops of produce, particularly rice which was the chief article of food in Bengal. But sometimes this kind of continued prosperity would have a result the reverse of what might have been expected, for the crop of rice would be so large that prices would fall to such a level that the ryot would sell at a disadvantage. Consequently the capacity of the ryot to purchase articles of necessity and luxury was affected by his want of money, though he had plenty of means of a nature not capable of being turned into cash profitably.<sup>131</sup>

The piece-goods business was disorganized as a result of the Indian exchange crisis of the last quarter of the 19th century. It did not, however, equally affect all engaged in the piece-goods trade. Importers who had fixed the exchange for forward delivery lost heavily owing to the bazar dealers catching at any pretext to repudiate their contracts. While merchants who had sold forward without fixing the exchange made a large profit. On the other hand, the bazar dealers, men of small capital, working an enormous business chiefly on credit, saved themselves by rejecting their contracts and were reported not to have done badly on the whole.<sup>132</sup> In addition to the lower rates of exchange the trade was also affected by a constant fall in the value of raw cotton with a corresponding decline in the manufactured article. The merchants who had bought their goods in anticipation of the market, suffered.<sup>133</sup> After a brief recovery in 1897-98, the piece-goods trade declined sharply in 1900-01 owing to the depression which existed in the cotton-spinning industry and the economic distress amongst the people which discouraged consumption.<sup>134</sup> The trade began to pick up in the new century. In 1902-03 more than half of the imported cotton piece-goods went to the Bengal districts. The U.P. was the next largest recipient. Of the total weight of cotton goods exported from Calcutta about 1/5 reached its destination by river.<sup>135</sup>



It is interesting to note that per capita consumption of European piece-goods was largest in East Bengal where people had a comparatively higher standard of living. This region stood first in the export of rice, jute and oil seeds and in return took in larger supplies of imported articles like piece-goods and salt. Bihar came next owing to the large trade of Patna. In 1876-77 per capita consumption of cotton piece-goods in Bengal was as follows :

TABLE 14

			Rs.	A	P
Western districts	...	...	0	9	6
Central	„	...	0	15	7
Eastern	„	...	1	2	10
Bihar	...	...	1	2	8
Orissa	...	...	0	4	5
Assam	...	...	1	1	5

In Orissa the weavers still retained their old position and the supply of European piece-goods was comparatively small.<sup>136</sup> In other areas the decline of the handloom manufacture was too evident a fact and was every year referred to by the Divisional Commissioners in their annual reports.

This brings us to a further factor which was a noteworthy feature of the piece-goods trade. This was the introduction of Indian material manufactured in Bombay into the Bengal market. As early as 1880 the trade was important enough to be shown separately in the returns of the E.I. Railway.<sup>137</sup>

### SALT

Liverpool salt started coming to Bengal about 1850 to take the place of salt which used to be manufactured in the Province. It was introduced gradually and not without difficulties. In the latter part of the period under survey an interesting and noteworthy feature of the salt trade was the steadily increasing introduction of crushed salt in competition with Liverpool salt. This crushed salt comprised the salt imported from Hamburg, the crushed *kurkutch* or sun-evaporated salt sent from Aden and the *kurkutch* which was crushed by permission in the Sulkea Golahs.<sup>138</sup>

### KEROSENE

This imported fuel oil became popular during the latter part of our period. It was officially reported in 1890-91 that the expansion of this trade was steady. Prices did not fluctuate much and imports went rapidly into consumption there being no accumulation of stocks.<sup>139</sup>



### IMPORTS INTO CALCUTTA

The growth of the jute trade was a remarkable feature of the internal trade of Bengal as well as of its foreign trade. The Collector of Dacca reported in 1876 that when he first went to the district in 1863 the Borneo Company was the only European concern that traded in jute. But in 1876 the number of big European and American firms totalled ten. There were also many smaller firms, mainly Indian, which did a large jute business. Mymensingh exported more jute than any other district. The large importation of piece-goods, salt and of such comparative luxuries as sugar, tobacco, betel nuts and spices indicated the comparatively prosperous condition of the Mymensingh peasantry.<sup>140</sup> Jute led the list of the principal imports into Calcutta in 1900-01 in the order of their importance in the domestic trade.

Besides food grains, tea and oil seeds, coal and coke were important items of imports into Calcutta. At the turn of century Calcutta exported over one million maunds annually to the interior of Bengal. This was practically all Bengal coal distributed by river.<sup>141</sup>

### INDIGO

The share taken by indigo in the trade sharply declined during the closing years of the period under survey. The export of indigo in 1899-1900 amounted to only 59,078 cwts the lowest recorded during the the decade. Those engaged in the trade saw in it the effect of the competition of the synthetic dye.<sup>142</sup> In 1900-01 Bihar contributed 68·6% of the total imports into Calcutta and the U.P. 29·4%.<sup>142</sup>

By 1905 it was clear that machine-made goods were gradually replacing those made by hand in the villages of Bengal. The new imports introduced the middle classes and even the poor to novel habits of consumption. Cheap cotton cloth from Manchester still known as *markin* supplanted the stronger but more costly country cloth. Shoes of English manufacture were rapidly displacing the country-made article. Knives, axes and similar other implements from Sheffield and the continent ousted the rougher implements made by the village blacksmith. The brass and coppersmith still held his own because people still preferred domestic cooking and other utensils of these materials to enamelled sauce-pans and other imported substitutes. Amongst the Muslims, however, chinaware was being used instead of the local potter's earthen vessels.<sup>143</sup>

The internal trade of Bengal during the early part of the period under review was characterised by the removal of the internal customs barriers. With the aid of improved means of communication and transport, all the internal markets became tied to the system of wholesalers and brokers operating in Calcutta and other major centres of trade. An attempt was made to introduce a uniform standard of weights and measures. Every effort was made to boost up the supply of raw materials. Altogether the



period saw the growth of the region into one great market which was an ideal field of operation for industrial capitalism.

### PARTITION OF BENGAL

In 1904 Bengal stood on the eve of great changes. The proposed partition of the province was exercising the minds of men. A great movement was about to be launched. Bengali merchants were also trying to respond to the challenge of partition in their own ways. It may be of some interest to see how they looked at this prospect. Rai Sita Nath Roy Bahadur, as the Honorary Secretary of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, submitted a memorandum on the subject. The Chamber's Committee apprehended that the direct result of the proposed partition would lead to a diversion of the whole of the jute trade of East Bengal as well as the rice of Buckergunge to Chittagong. This would affect the traffic of the port of Calcutta at whose cost only the port of Chittagong could develop and prosper. It was pointed out that the change might or might not affect British commerce in Bengal but it would prove the ruin of these Indian merchants who had invested capital in Calcutta. Indian capital was very limited and the loss of the existing capitalists would mean the ruin of 'native trade'.<sup>144</sup>

Examined in the light of what has been sketched above it will be seen that the period between 1833 and 1905 separates itself into two almost equal halves. The year 1870 may be regarded as the great watershed. The year was a turning point of the world's commercial development and it also saw the advent of a new era of commerce and trade in India, and, for that matter, in Bengal. The second period 1870-1905 saw a steady expansion of Bengal's trade, foreign and internal, for which the earlier period had been one of active preparation.

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## SOCIAL CHANGE

This study of social change avoids theoretical formulations but seeks to state facts and generalizations along some of the lines suggested by the more theoretical social sciences. It is based on certain assumptions but they are of an elementary nature and are not, therefore, open to much controversy.

One basic assumption in this study is the one relating to urbanism as a crucial factor in social change. The phenomenon of social change cannot certainly be reduced to urbanization. But within the historical setting of the late 18th century, the starting point of this study, and the nineteenth century, urbanism, or more precisely, the possibilities of urbanism, acquire a particular historical significance. The other basic assumption in this paper is that relating to the idea of traditional society. The absence of any basic economic change, especially the lack of social impact of industrialism, has been taken for granted, and not much attention has been paid to the economic implications of traditional society.

This paper is mainly a study of Bengali society as it was open to external pressures of change. The capability of even a deeply traditional society to have some spontaneous pressures of change within itself is admitted, but they have not been systematically treated here. This is not again a basically structural study. The purpose is to present certain aspects of a historical situation which appear to be particularly significant. The accent has been on the interaction of external pressures and the force of continuity within society and an overall rural pull on urban life has been stressed.

A certain unity has been sought to be preserved in presentation. But the unequal availability of data has resulted in a somewhat forced limitation of discussion on certain crucial points. According to a somewhat loosely constructed scheme, this study would first focus on the growth of a new urban society in Bengal that can be described as the metropolitan society.

A significant question that cannot be adequately answered for lack of data and previous analysis relates to the extent to which the metropolitan society represented a historical departure from traditional urbanism. The mediaeval Indian city does not represent a single type. The variations on a regional basis between commercial towns, administrative towns, military or religious centres, have not been adequately worked out. The dominant type, however, was the market towns with occasional overlapping with administrative centres. In the case of Bengal, two typical cases of such overlapping up to mid-19th century were Dacca and Murshidabad. These two urban centres had many of the ingredients of western urbanism in respect of density of population or volume of trade. But if this can be called the primary stage of urbanization, the impulse



for change into the second stage, the meeting of the frontiers of commerce and society, the latter with its inner organization and values, never occurred. The amalgamation of the Portuguese, Dutch, Moors, English, French, Armenians, Central Asians, Marwaris, North Indians and Bengalis in a typical commercial city in Bengal obviously failed to produce that element of fluidity in respect of kinship and familial traditions, which is the essence of western urbanism as a historical phenomenon. It might have been the ubiquity of the market in a traditional Indian city, an overdose of primary requisites, which frustrated the secondary form of urbanization. This failure of traditional urbanism to transform itself into a social force is, perhaps, best represented by the traditional *bania* castes of India—the Marwaris and Subarnabaniks, so far as Bengal was concerned—who had been intensely loyal to kinship and caste traditions. The great urban banking house of the Jagat Seths left no impact on society and culture, except so far as it accomplished some religious deeds confined to the Marwari community.

In its physical character and in most of its attributes, Calcutta, even up to the late 18th century, appears to have been a traditional type of city outside the English town. The 'native' and the English town were two separate entities which met only on the line of business. The 'native' town, for the greater part of the 18th century, was a collection of markets. The only point of difference, and a point that became increasingly significant, from the traditional type of city, lay very probably in the growing concentration of high caste people, who initially profited from commerce but who were, nevertheless, strangers to the commercial tradition. The inter-action of tradition and change in the history of Calcutta is the implicit guideline of the greater part of the following narrative.

In one of the earliest references to Calcutta in Wilson's *Annals* the names of a number of 'bazars' appear. Calcutta in the first decade of the 18th century was a collection of marts or 'native ganges', patches of raised lands or 'dehis' inhabited mainly by fishermen called Nikaris, Jalias and Pods, swamps, creeks, paddy fields and jungles varying from deep forest to scattered undergrowth. With the completion of the Fort in the first decade of the century, the Portuguese and the Armenian inhabitants together with a few Dutch and Danes, clustered round the 'factory' and the Fort. The Burrabazar (already called the Great Bazar) "supplied provisions to the British settlement." The area of Burrabazar "had every available space within the boundaries taken up by the houses and shops of native traders". In 1706, only "248 bighas of land were... occupied with dwellings in Town Calcutta, and 364 bighas were shortly to be utilised for houses, although the Great Bazar to its immediate north was already most populous, having 400 bighas built over out of the entire area of 488 bighas." The small town with the Fort and its adjuncts was surrounded by 1,470 bighas of land in "Dihi Calcutta," partly cultivated and partly waste. On the north of this *dihi* was Sutanuti, already



containing 134 bighas of inhabited land, with 1,558 bighas under jungle and cultivation. To the south of *dih*i Calcutta stood Govindapur, high on the river bank, with only 57 bighas out of a total area of 1,178 bighas, covered by human habitations, most of the rest being dense jungle. The 'town' of Sutanuti of which Burrabazar formed the nucleus made rapid progress, during the century, and, with the increase in the number and diversity of the opulent categories of Indian population, played a central role in the growth of metropolitan society. The following table gives a certain idea of the physical growth of Calcutta, mainly from a rural (perhaps, more accurately, paddy fields, jungles, swamps etc.) into an urban settlement.

## TOWN AREAS IN ACREAGE

Year	Urban	Rural	Total	Pucka	Kutch
1706	216	1,476	1,692	8	8,000
1726	332	2,018	2,350	40	13,300
1742	448	2,781	3,229	121	14,747
1756	704	2,525	3,229	498	14,450
1794	3,714	1,283	4,997	1,114	13,657

The figures have been prepared on the basis of a study of successive maps and plans of the city of Calcutta by the writer of A short history of Calcutta (Census vol. 1901).

By the middle of the 18th century Calcutta had advanced quite a distance from a haphazard collection of hamlets towards a traditional type of Indian city. In that transitional stage of the growth of Calcutta the pattern of the Indian village came to be reflected in it. The English town was a 'fenced city' sharply distinguished from the 'native town'. The latter had become settled with a large number of castes and professionals. Holwell, the Zamindar (Magistrate Collector) of Calcutta, divided the town into a number of quarters, allotting each quarter to one professional group or caste. "Thus originated *tolas* and *tulis*. . . . :—Kumartuli for the *Kumars* (potters), Colootola for the *Kalus* (oil pressures), Jeliatola for the *Jelias* (fish catchers), Domtooly for the *Doms* or scavengers or basket-makers, Goalatolly for the *Goalas* (Holwell's 'palanquin bearers, milkmen'), Ahirtola for the *ahirs* (Behari goalas as distinguished from the Bengali *goalas*), Cossaitola for the *Cossais* (butchers), Patuatola for the *Patuas* (painters), Sankharitola for the *sankharis* (conchshell workers), Beparitola for the *Beparis* (petty traders). . . . " There were also Haripara (for sweepers), Musalmanpara, Ooryapara, Darzipara (for tailors) Dhobapara (for washermen), Telipara (for oil pressurers) and many other localities. This caste-wise or profession-wise division of the town reflected the strong traditional pull that operated on the process of urbanization in the metropolis and left its stamp on the later stages of its growth. A mid-18th century Calcutta was yet to develop the consolidated



society dominated by opulent and largely high caste groups of the Bengali community. The Maratha scare of the forties had just infused a large dose of high caste and opulent elements from the surrounding districts. But 'when Calcutta was but sparsely peopled, and the respectable classes kept away from it, on account of its deadly malaria and unsavoury surroundings, people who had given their names to the following lanes of Calcutta 'were then above their fellow residents from a worldly point of view.'

Chidam Mudee's Lane (named after a grocer) Panchu Dhobany Gully (named after a laundress) Shama Bai's Gully (named after a dancing girl) Okhil Mistri's Lane (named after a mechanic) Ramhurry Mistri's Lane (named after a carpenter) Ramkanto Mistry's Lane (Ditto). Some other lanes bore the names of Khansamas, tailors, etc.

With the political changes in mid-18th century, Calcutta became a metropolis and immediately underwent a significant physical expansion with the incorporation of the suburbs of Panchannagram or 55 villages. By that time Calcutta had become a city composed of heterogeneous elements. Among the business community the North Indian elements were quite prominent as they had been in Dacca and also in Murshidabad. The Jagat Seths had 'Kuthi' in Burrabazar, so had Bolaky Das and the Dugars. Omichand had made his fortune as the Company's broker. Huzoorimall, a relative of Omichand, was one of the richest men in the city. From the scattered data, mainly available about the first half of the 19th century, it would appear that the North Indian merchants had already established themselves at mid-century in the sectors of indigenous banking, money changing, and inland trade connections with North India. This was nothing unusual because they had command of these sectors in Dacca and Murshidabad. Their rapid rise to prominence in the 19th century was the result of a fairly entrenched position in some vital sectors and their command over a vast North Indian hinterland, which the traditional mercantile castes of Bengal had failed to develop because of their non-migratory habits. The judicial records reveal this complex network of business connections, though Marwari business was generally, for understandable reasons, very ill-represented in institutional records. The judicial records, however, leave no doubt about the significant position of the Armenians in the commercial world of Calcutta.

Yet, Calcutta, in the second half of the 18th century, was essentially a banian city—rather, a city of banians and dewans, the business intermediaries of the Company and superior Indian officials. In these fields the predominance of Bengali Hindus is an unmistakable feature of the history of this period.

The social evolution of the metropolis derived its chief motive force from the elite groups of Bengali Hindu population in the metropolis. In the pre-metropolitan stage of Calcutta society, the role of the Setts and Basaks of the weaver caste, as a clan or group, must have been signi-



ficant. The prominence of the Setts and Basaks in the field of the Company's investment gave them a unique position with the English. The virtual monopolistic control of the Setts over the Company's investment is demonstrated by their refusal in 1748 to do any business with the Company for employing some persons not belonging to their caste in their own line of business. The Company had to yield to the challenge of the Setts. A particularly redoubtable figure in the Calcutta of eighteen thirties was Baisnabdas Sett, who was the Company's broker from 1724 to 1732. The crucial trade in cotton and yarn in Calcutta had been dominated by the Sett Brothers, Janardan and Baranashi, who were brokers from 1706 to 1724 (with a gap of four years from 1715 to 1719) before Baisnabdas succeeded to the position. The wealthy Omichand was a protege of Baisnabdas. He died in 1752 in tragic circumstances of declining fortune but he left a legend behind him. Baisnabdas must have commanded great social prestige for many stories about him are part of the traditional history of Calcutta. He perhaps made a very effective contribution to the norms of social behaviour among opulent Bengalis in the growing society of Calcutta.

The fortune of the Setts began to decline rapidly after the switchover of the Company's investment from the *dadni* system to direct agency in 1753. Among the Setts late in the eighteenth century, the most prominent in judicial records is Gobindacharan (Govindchurn) Sett, who was still carrying on trade in cotton. But he, too, appears to have faced some kind of crisis for a bond, dated 1771, reveals that he had mortgaged his shares in twenty-one places (shops, houses and gardens) in and around Calcutta to Raja Nabakrishna and that he had not paid off even after the expiry of the date of the bond. The judicial records of the late 18th century generally speak of the modest circumstances of the Setts, whose names, however, are still quite prominent in them. Some of the descendants of the Setts figure as money-lenders in early 19th century. The extensive landed property that the Setts originally possessed in Burrabazar is revealed in an interesting judicial document. After the decline of the Setts, the Basaks, a related clan of the same weaver caste, continued to be prominent. Sobharam Basak, who died in 1780, was very rich and powerful with a great deal of power over the metropolitan community. He had been a commissioner for the distribution of restitution money after the sack of Calcutta in 1756 and took the largest share of it. The Basaks figure prominently as share-holders to the Bank of Bengal in early 19th century. But Sobharam was the last great representative of the Sett-Basak clan.

Even during the period of Sett-Basak ascendancy a different line of social ascent was represented by Gobindaram Mitra of Kumartuli—the power of the office. The Kayastha community to which he belonged had been showing signs of rising to a dominant position in Calcutta. The Dattas of Hatkhola, though rather ill-represented in available records, have a unique position in the traditional history of Calcutta as a family



of established opulence in the earliest stage of Calcutta's growth. They appear to have prospered both as independent businessmen and as associates of the East India Company. The last and the most conspicuous representative of this family in the mercantile line was Madan Mohan Datta, a late 18th century ship-owner and merchant, who fostered the ability of Ramdulal De, the Bengali millionaire of the early 19th century. A Supreme Court document of the early 19th century shows one branch of the family as an established landowner and also a proprietor of an indigo factory.

Gobindaram Mitra, who belonged to the same Kayastha community, wielded unique power by virtue of his office as Black Zamindar, a kind of deputy to the European Collector of Calcutta, at a stage of English administration of the city when an able Indian assistant could hold his English employers, ignorant of Indian modes, almost completely under his control. Gobindaram held such a position from the inception of the office of the Black Zamindar in 1720 down to 1756. Stories about his power and prestige are part of the traditional history of early Calcutta. 'He spent vast sums of money during his lifetime in the erection of temples and the performance of *poojahs* and religious ceremonies on a scale of pomp and magnificence to which Calcutta has been a stranger. . . . He is said to have built in 1730 a magnificent *noboruttna* (or nine jewel) temple on the Chitpore Road, the highest pinnacle of which was higher than the Ochterlony Monument (i.e. over 165 feet in height), and the smallest cupola of which still exists, the main building having been overthrown in the terrible cyclone and earthquake which devastated Calcutta in 1737.' He also heads the list of Commissioners for the distribution of restitution money after the sack of Calcutta and obtained compensation equal to that of Sobharam. His was perhaps the earliest individual influence in shaping the pattern of social behaviour for the elite groups of the Bengali metropolitan community.

The type of traditional expenditure of which Gobindaram and some of his contemporaries set an example was part of an overall patronage of tradition, which, in the metropolitan environment created an atmosphere conducive to the growth of a metropolitan community with certain significant point of contact for some of its diverse elements. These diverse elements stood for different castes, sub-castes and professional groups within the Bengali Hindu community. Even through the later stages of social evolution, the essentially partial character of metropolitan development tended to persist and twist the logic of urban social growth.

Yet, within the historical setting of the late 18th century the intensity of the aspirations of the dominant families or elite groups to a social position fulfilled a purpose, however limited, by the forces of tradition. The English victory released into the population of the *de facto* metropolis a very sizable element which went by the general appellation of 'banian' or 'dewan' but which was, in fact, a highly complex amalgam of diverse and overlapping categories.



In a very broad general sense, the 'banians' and 'dewans' were the intermediaries of the English in the field of trade and administration. The judicial records of the 18th century bear testimony to the far-flung character of private trade of the Company's servants. The banians were mainly associated with that kind of trade. An interesting description of the banian at the height of his power in the late 18th century occurs in an article on old Calcutta in which the following passage is quoted :—

"Banyan is a person either acting for himself or as the substitute of some great black merchant by whom the English gentlemen, in general, transact all their business. He is the interpreter, head book-keeper, head secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash keeper, and in general also secret keeper. He puts in the under-clerks, the porter or door-keeper, stewards, bearers of the silver, slaves, running footmen, torch and branch light-carriers, palanquin bearers, and all the long tribe of under-servants, for whose honesty he is deemed answerable and he conducts all the trade of his master, to whom, unless pretty well acquainted with the country languages, it is difficult for any of the natives to obtain access. . . . (He) further serves very conveniently sometimes in public discussion to farther such acts and proceedings as his master durst not avow. There is a powerful string of connections among the Banyans who serve the English in all the settlements of Bengal, as well in all public offices as in their private offices. Since the great influence acquired there by the English, many persons of the best Gentoo families take upon them this trust of servitude, and even pay a sum of money for serving gentlemen in certain posts ; but principally for the influence they acquire thereby, and the advantage of carrying on trade, which they could not otherwise do, duty free under cover of their masters' *dustucks*. There have been few instances of any European acquiring such a knowledge in speaking and writing the Bengali language which is absolutely necessary for a real merchant) as to be able to do without such a Head Banyan."

The most powerful banian in the late 18th century was undoubtedly Gokul Ghosal (died 1779). He was the banian of Governor Verelst and was 'concerned largely with inland and foreign trade.' In the Mayor's court case between the Executors of Daniel Hoissard and Gokal Ghosal in 1773, it is found that there was a joint trade concern between Hoissard, who was a church warden and Gokul Ghosal. All appointments were made on his recommendation. "In Exhibit no 15 we have a Bengali account abstracted from the final aurung invoices of gomastas of goods received by the agents and servants of Gokul Ghosal" who collected all goods for the Company. "We also find in an exhibit in a case of Charles Child that he (Child) bought the whole share of the purchase made by Modun Dutt in partnership with Gokul Ghosal of the opium



exported in 1769 from Patna. Charles Child was possibly a free merchant."

In the case of James Archdekin Vs. Joynarain Ghosal (1781), the former, Commissary to the Third Brigade, states that he entered into a partnership in 1769 with Gokul Ghosal. "He could borrow of Gokul Ghosal for trade up the country to the extent of 30,000 rupees. Gokul Ghosal was to have  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the net profits and he was also to take  $\frac{1}{4}$  share of all losses. In consideration of the Europeans being prohibited to trade in salt, betelnut and tobacco, Gokul Ghosal was to have one half of the profits for all and every concern that might be entered into by the parties in those three prohibited articles of inland trade, it being understood that ..... Gokul Ghosal would bear one half of the losses. Monhur Mukherjee, a relative of Gokul Ghosal, accompanied James Archdekin. At Monghyr they began trade in cloth, rice, opium, wax, tobacco and other articles as also *saul* timber. Gokul Ghosal's established reputation for business integrity, fair dealing and the status he filled as head banian to the Governor were helpful factors." In another judicial document, dated 1784, Gokul Ghosal is described as a partner along with Thomas Rumbold, Chief at Patna and later Member of the Board and of the Committee of Works, Governor Verelst, Walter Wilkins, Chief of Chittagong factory and Moden (Madan) Dutta, an outstanding banian and trader of the time. The partnership concern 'purchased a ship on a scheme of trade to send opium to the eastward.'

Gokul Ghosal thus appears not only as a banian but as an equal partner of Europeans. The typical banian was no doubt a kind of broker or agent, but some men of ability could rise above the level of intermediaries, though they maintained, for its advantage, a link with powerful Englishmen as agents. Some of the Malliks and Dattas held a position similar to that of Ghosal. Another outstanding example of a banian rising to the position of partnership is Ramdulal De, who, however, belonged to a later period.

It appears from the family history of the Tagores that in early 18th century they lived on the swamps of Calcutta as neighbours of the traditional denizens of the marshes of Bengal—the fishermen castes of Pods and Jelias. They probably acted as suppliers of goods and provisions to the captains of ships and free merchants. They were Pirali (tainted) Brahmins and got their title Tagore from Thakur by which name they were probably called by their humble neighbours. A traditional Bengali couplet describes the Piralis, Kayets (Kayasthas), Tantis (weavers) and Sonarbenes (Subarnabaniks, the traditional mercantile caste of Bengal) as the founders of Calcutta. The reference is clearly to the Setts and Basaks, the Tagores, the Dattas and the Malliks.

The structure of the opulent community in the second half of the 18th century can be reconstructed from a list prepared by a member of a leading Calcutta family between 1822 and 1829, supplemented by family



history and judicial records. The data are presented below in a synoptic form :—

(1) Nemaicharan Mallik or Nemychurn Mullik of English sources—Banyan and merchant (founder of the Mallik family of Burrabazar—Subarnabanik.)

(2) Raghu Mitra and Abhoycharan Mitra, son and grandson respectively of Gobindaram Mitra, Deputy Zamindar in pre-metropolitan Calcutta—Kayastha.

(3) Madan Mohan Datta of the Datta family of Hatkhola—merchant.—Kayastha.

(4) Ramkrishna Mallik—merchant—founder of the Mallik family of Pathuriaghata—Subarnabanik.

(5) Lakshmikanta Dhar or Naku Dhar—'banker' to Clive and other Governors—founder of the prosperity of the Posta Raj family—Subarnabanik.

(6) Maharaja Nabakrishna—Persian Munshi and Political Banyan to the Company—held responsible posts under Clive and Verelst—founder of the Sobhabazar Raj family—died 1797—Kayastha.

(7) Ramlochan Ghosh—Sircar (dewan or banyan) to Mrs. Hastings—had also connections with Mr. Hastings—founder of the Ghosh family of Pathuriaghata—Kayastha.

(8) Gokul Ghosal—banian to Governor Verelst and independent merchant—died 1779—Brahmin.

(9) Darpanarain Tagore (died 1793)—merchant and banian—founder of the Senior Branch of the Tagore family—son of Joyram Tagore, Amin to the East India Company. Nilmony Tagore—also Amin to the Company—son of Joyram (Pirali Brahmin.)

(10) Gangagobinda Singh—Dewan to the Committee of Revenue, one of the founders of the Paikpara Raj family—Kayastha.

(11) Santiram Singh—Dewan or Banian to the Chief of Patna—Kayastha.

(12) Akrur Datta—sloop-contractor to the East India Company—Kayastha.

(13) Gokul Mitra—Contractor of supplies to the Company—Kayastha.

The above list is selective but broadly representative and shows the unusual prominence of the Kayasthas. The leadership of the growing metropolitan society had passed into their hands. The Subarnabaniks, for some time, were keen contestants. Besides the three families mentioned in the list, there were other Subarnabanik families of opulence. But their position in caste hierarchy stood in the way. Within the Kayastha community itself, there was severe contest out of which emerged Raja Nabakrishna as the leading figure of the metropolitan community. Nabakrishna had to contend against older families represented by Churamani Datta and the Dattas of Hathkhola. The story of this struggle for social leadership is part of the traditional history of Calcutta.



It is at this stage that tradition played a vital role in the evolution of the metropolitan community. The new elite groups, unable to rise above tradition, worked within the traditional framework with an intensity that was itself a force of no mean significance. The metropolis became a centre of hectic social activity on traditional lines, marking a clear shifting of social forces from older centres like Krishnanagar where the death of Maharaja Krishnachandra in 1782 may be said to have terminated an epoch in the patronage of tradition.

Raja Nabakrishna, the prefixed title, a Mughal award, signifying a change in the society of a basically commercial city, represents better than anybody else the social trends in the incipient metropolis. The period was one of tremendous social rivalry, of competitive performance of *pujas*, *sradhs*, marriages and perhaps even of the pre-funeral *Gangayatras* (ceremonial visit to the Ganges at the imminence of death). Rivalry for the acquisition of old and famous deities was also a feature of the era.

The crowning social achievement in Nabakrishna's career was the *ekjai* he held. This was an assembly of *Kulins* and *Ghataks* which elected him *Goshtipati* or head of the Dakshin Rarhi section of the Kayastha community. By virtue of this command over the most powerful caste in Calcutta, Nabakrishna came to control a substantial section of the Brahmin community, too. There is one element in Nabakrishna's social leadership which indicates a departure from tradition. He became the social leader even of Kulin Kayasthas and Brahmins in spite of his second grade position in Kayastha hierarchy.

The fact that he was only one among a large number of aspirants to social position, though the most successful of them, indicates the volume of social activity in traditional Calcutta. A steady migration of high caste people, among them Sanskrit scholars or *adhyapakas*, was one of the direct results of Calcutta's emergence as a centre of traditional social activity.

In all this activity there was a certain deviation from the norm, a hectic imbalance due largely to the unusual concentration of opulent people in a limited area. The performance of *sradhs* may be regarded as the most typical expression of traditional activity. In a Supreme Court document of the early 19th century, the following deposition occurs:— [It seeks to give an idea of the expenditure at the *Sradh* of Nemychurn Mullik].

"I am about 60 or 61 years of age. I was 15 years of age when I came to Calcutta. I knew Nemychurn Mullik. . . . I made the *dan*: by guess I distributed about 14 or 15 thousand rupees. *Danotsarga* consisted of gold, silver, woollen clothes, palanquin, horses. . . Kangalis numbered about 2 lakhs, coming mainly from outside Calcutta and filled houses from Jaunbazar to Baghbazar. Kangalis got Re. 1 each, ? got Rs. 2 each. Beggars were let into empty Thakurbaris of the houses. . . . I knew Raja Nubkissen, I was at his mother's *Sradh*. There were



great numbers of Kangalis. . . . I remember three famous *sradhs* in Bengal—Raja Nubkissen's mother's, Gangagobinda Singh's mother's and Nemychurn Mullik's *Sradh*. . . . A man performs according to the property he possesses. . . . Upon the performance of Gangagobinda's mother's *sradh* some say 18 lakhs, some say 20 lakhs were spent. People came from 12 to 15 days' journey. I do not know the expenses of *Sradh* of Nubkissen's mother—some say 4 lakhs, some 5 lakhs." [*dan* means offerings and gifts, *danotsarga* has similar meaning, Kangali means beggar; Thakurbari means temple attached to residential houses].

The performance of the *sradh* of Nabakrishna's mother is part of the traditional history of Calcutta. The early 19th century which was, in many respects, a continuation of the late 18th century is well served by newspaper material in which events that figure most prominently are the *sradhs*. The phenomenon of *sati*, which was basically an urban or suburban phenomenon, becomes more comprehensible against the background of an upsurge of traditional activity. The early 19th century reaction against these excesses took the most characteristic form in Brahmoism which above all stressed the virtues of balance and sobriety against the turmoil of traditional social practices. A vivid description of the *sradh* ceremony of Raja Nabakrishna's mother occurs in the pages of a 19th century journal. The description is based on current traditions about the event, and, even if this is exaggerated, its overall significance is enhanced by much circumstantial evidence:

"There were full thirty days between the death and the *sradh* day and Nubkissen's countrymen made good this advantage. At first the beggars, Bhats and Pariahs undertook the journey. Next there were those whose condition oscillated between decency and beggary. Lastly, men even in competent circumstances, tempted by large expectations and urged by greedy wives, complied with the small chance of being distinguished in the crowd, followed. . . . As presents were given per head the very babies were brought and when many of them died of suffocation, the parents preserved them for the occasion and exhibited them as if they were alive, added to their incomes. . . .

All the pundits of Bengal and many even of Benares were invited and came. Nubkissen with all his wealth could ill afford accommodation for the host. But in all cases where he failed, the Hindoo inhabitants of the city and the surrounding village opened their hospitable doors. The beggars slept in the fields, under trees and on the roadside. The dietetic resources and the confectionary skill of the whole country were invoked to feed the motley mass of humanity. . . . A nation besieging Nubkissen was too much for him. Some who had travelled a fortnight or twenty days received nothing at all. But the amlahs literally made fortunes. . . . Popular estimation reckons that sum [the sum spent at the *Sradh*] at nine lacs of rupees."

It is against this background of traditional activity that the new elite groups were consolidated on a traditional basis. The banian motif in



society was rapidly merging into the Raja motif. When the nineteenth century opened this was still the most vital force in society.

The challenge of Rammohun to the traditional system as it had established itself in Calcutta struck the first authentic metropolitan chord. The initial doubts of Rammohun could well arise out of a traditional Sanskrit-Persian education and they did. Such doubts, because of their essentially intellectual character, distinguishing them from the Bhakti line of dissent, would have very definitely remained at a personal level. In a traditional rural environment, a defiance of social authority would have brought the whole machinery of excommunication into action. Rammohun's dissent acquired the character of challenge in an environment where non-traditional forces were showing evidence of some action. An area of social freedom, still very narrow and quite unformed, was emerging, or perhaps had already emerged. Rammohun's challenge to idolatry at that historical stage had more than religious implications. The form of its expression was not of the traditionally mystic kind but a systematic criticism under a new urge. On a public level, the dissent indicated a new organization in the form of association of diverse types of people, representing urban variety up to a certain extent, namely zamindars, scholars both of traditional and new learning, middle class men and aristocrats. On a domestic level, this dissent indicated a concept of individual comfort. In his preface to *Kena Upanishad* (1817) Rammohun expresses his desire to correct the "exceptionable practices which not only deprive Hindus, in general, of the common comforts of society, but also lead them frequently to self destruction. . . . A Hindu of caste can eat only once between sunrise and sunset, cannot eat victuals in a boat or ship. . . . nor any food that has been touched by a person of different caste, nor if interrupted while eating can he resume his meal."

The dissent of Rammohun and early Brahmoism anticipates many social developments inevitable under the influence of urbanism and new education; yet, Brahmoism, throughout the nineteenth century, retained the distinct stamp of its origin in a more than usual emphasis on the principles of balance and sobriety, representing a distinct recoil from some of the features of practical Hinduism.

The hostility aroused by Rammohun was intense and bitter. The orthodox bloc had acquired remarkable cohesion from the middle of the 18th century. The traditional values had not only been established but had acquired a new vigour. Rammohun's monotheism was in itself a challenge. It became more so where some new factors combined with it. The *Atmiya Sabha* founded in 1815, represented a new mode of organization which gave an unusual prominence to the anti-idolatrous views of Rammohun and his followers. Added to this were the new dialectical weapons furnished by the press—pamphlets, tracts and newspapers. The movement against Sati furnished another new factor—that of systematic campaign. The orthodox counterblast was impressive. The petition against the abolition of Sati derived wide support from the most powerful



elements in society. The foundation of the *Dharma Sabha* in 1830 was an impressive testimony to the power and grandeur of traditional forces.

During the period of Rammohun's dissent, or roughly from the first to the third decade of the 19th century, the structure of metropolitan society had been undergoing some modification. New accession to the opulent stratum was getting restricted as the old categories of banians and dewans were losing some of their grip on trade and administration under the combined influence of Cornwallis's system and Agency Houses. Monetary transactions with Europeans were still very profitable. Rammohun established the base of his opulence through money lending business in Calcutta from 1797 to 1815 and purchased zamindaris yielding an annual income of Rs. 10,000. But the Europeans had generally outgrown the need for absolute dependence on Indian agency. Profits from such positions as those of banians and dewans were thus modest by 18th century standards. A striking exception was Ramdulal Dey, who, however, built the foundation of his fortune in the late 18th century and did much independent business, besides being banian to the redoubtable Fairlie Ferguson & Co. The general trend in this period was towards the growth of a class of moderate opulence below the established 18th century elite. Ganganarain Sircar was Sircar to the Palmer & Co and amassed considerable wealth. Ramkamal Sen (1783-1844), founder of the famous Sen family of Kalutola, was treasurer to the Bank of Bengal. Radha Madhab Banerjee made his fortune by holding the post of dewan under Government in the opium factory at Patna.

While a second layer of opulent community was forming in the early 19th century, a diversification of personality types, representing a distinct shift from the eighteenth century monolith of tradition, was becoming increasingly perceptible. Rammohun's forceful opponent, Radha Kanta Deb (1784-1867), the acknowledged leader of traditionalism, tended to interpret tradition not in terms of hectic religious or social activity but through emphasis on a kind of balance and propriety. Ramkamal Sen was rigidly orthodox in religious and social observances but he combined this with a remarkable zeal for education and public service in the western sense.

Radhakanta Deb took a leading part in the foundation of the Hindu College and was an active member of its Managing Committee. "On the foundation of the School Book Society, the Hindus feared to purchase books published under its patronage lest they should contain anything inimical to religion; he became one of its leading members. . . and paved the way for the introduction of its books into native schools and society". He himself was educated at Mr. Cumming's Academy, a private English school. He stressed the importance of female education, though not in public schools, and considered it to be quite in agreement with the Hindu Shashtra. He edited the great Sanskrit lexicon, *Sabdakalpadruma*, and was Vice-President of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society. In his will he strictly limited the expenditure on his obsequies to ten thousand rupees.



Ram Kamal Sen began as a compositor in Dr. Hunter's Hindustani Press on eight rupees a month. He attracted the attention of Dr. Wilson, who later became Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford. He was first promoted to some 'subordinate situation' in the establishment of the Arabic Society, which introduced him to the notice of some of the most distinguished members of the European society. He had by that time acquired considerable fluency in English. A colloquial knowledge of English was rare at that time. He became member of the Committee of the Calcutta School Book Society and helped in the compilation and translation of several useful works. The organization of the Hindu College (1817) owes much to his ability to manage the complicated details of business. He was placed at the head of the Native Establishment of the Mint by Dr. Wilson, the Assay Master. This was a highly responsible and lucrative position which raised him to great distinction. He later on accepted the office of Treasurer to the Bank of Bengal. He was on the committee of the Asiatic Society, a Vice-President of the Agricultural Society. He was yet 'a bigoted Hindu' for he was 'never in advance of his creed'.

For all their rigid attachment to tradition, both Radhakanta Deb and Ramkamal Sen were products of a distinct change in metropolitan environment. Among Rammohun's close associates and collaborators, Dwarkanath Tagore and Prasannakumar Tagore represented a combination of the influence of western education, financial ability and family tradition. From the point of view of family origin, they emerged out of the 18th century elite; but in their personalities can be found, in a highly forceful form, clear symptoms of the growth of new structural elements in metropolitan society.

It was not till the late twenties and early thirties that the emergence of a distinct element in society, opposed to the old dominant group, affords clear indication of a rival system of values. What had been emerging was an intelligentsia in the western sense of the term. The stratum of society from which the new force was making itself felt may be placed somewhere below the opulent layers of the metropolitan community. A contemporary journal described, in 1830, the scholars of Hindu College as "sons of dewans, brothers of clerks, nephews of cashiers (Khajanchis) or grandsons of Sarkars dealing with the disposal, auction and sale of goods". A contemporary literary work appears to refer to this element as 'bhadroluk' or gentry in both comfortable and straitened circumstances.

The thirties and forties of the 19th century afford opportunity for a study of contradictory trends, social potentialities and frustrated possibilities. Though lacking in the firmness of the later era, it has greater breadth and wider, though uncertain, vision. Economically, Bengali society was still subject to the possibilities represented by commerce and capital. Socially and intellectually it had been abruptly opened to new forces.



The death of Ramdulal De, the Bengali millionaire, in 1825, did, indeed, mark the end of an epoch in Bengali commercial activity. But the old commercial tradition with its strong speculative bias still produced merchants like Motilal Seal and Biswanath Motilal, both of whom attained great prominence in the thirties and forties. Motilal Seal is described as a successor of Ramdulal De to the dictatorship of the Calcutta money market. The other facet of commercial activity is represented in a highly sophisticated form by Dwarkanath Tagore. The High Court Records and contemporary journals, both English and Bengali, are full of references to his activity. The wide scope of his business interests was unusual even by European standards in India and represents an entrepreneurial outlook which was a singular phenomenon in Bengali society. The whole complex of Dwarkanath's business interests included Calcutta house properties, zamindaris, indigo factories, silk filatures, banks, insurance and commercial houses, and finally, coal mines. A kindred individual in the Indian business world in Calcutta was the Parsee merchant, Rustomjee Cowasjee, mainly interested in the shipment of opium and organization of insurance companies. The High Court Records indicate that a number of Bengali families were involved in opium transactions and some possessed indigo factories. A work on family history describes one Ram Sanyal of Calcutta as the proprietor of 24(?) indigo factories. Bengali interest, during this period, in banking and European mode of business was fairly present. Yet the character of Dwarkanath's enterprise was very different from the prevailing norms in Bengali commercial community. The unusual character of Dwarkanath's endeavour does not, however, obscure the fact that he was the product of an environment still very much subject to the pull of commercialism.

The operation of a distinct non-commercial pull on society at this stage is represented by Prasannakumar Tagore, who belonged to the senior branch of the Tagore family as Dwarkanath belonged to the junior. They had a remarkable kinship of ideas, attitudes and enterprise. Prasannakumar's branch of the Tagore family had a strong commercial background. But the family received a severe shock in opium transactions. With his remarkable knowledge of English and law, Prasannakumar was finally attached to the lucrative profession of law. His choice of a profession of a purely western type was the beginning of a significant development in the occupational structure of Bengal society. Prasannakumar combined his legal practice with personal management of the zamindaris. He first started by pleading his own zamindari cases at the law court. This combination of activities on two different lines was also practised by Dwarkanath. Such a combination, however, became highly unusual from the point of view of later developments and is the evidence of a striking intensity of initiative in the early stage of westernization in Bengal. Dwarkanath's departure from the line of traditional commercial activity and Prasannakumar's choice of a non-traditional profession are, however, significant in quite different ways. Dwarkanath's enter-



prise was quite an individual phenomenon in Bengal society. Prasannakumar's choice is directly linked with the phenomenon of western education and with the somewhat narrow channel along which it was to bring changes in Bengali society.

On the same plane as Prasannakumar, another person had been attracting much prominence in Calcutta in the twenties and thirties. Son of a rich banian, Nilmony Datta, founder of the fame of a highly anglicised family with a pronounced literary bent, Rasomoy Dutta (1799-1854) rose to be a judge in Calcutta Small Causes Court. In his personality, too, there is a combination of a high degree of knowledge of English and law. He started as a Book Keeper to the firm of Messrs. Davidson & Co. on a salary of Rs. 16 and later worked in several commercial houses before his judicial appointment. He left a property of six lakhs of rupees and a family that produced both literary and administrative talent. Rasomoy Dutta was a linguist who knew English, Bengali, Arabic and Persian.

Both Prasannakumar and Rasomoy acquired English education on a private level. The Hindu College, founded in 1817, had started releasing, by the late twenties, groups of young men who had received English education on an organised public level. The Young Bengal, the category by which the new groups were described, were still a highly mixed phenomenon but the dominant element in it becomes unmistakable from its final social orientation. Among the prominent members of these groups were Tarachand Chakrabarti, Chandrasekhar Deb, Ramgopal Ghosh, Rasik Krishna Mallik, Ramtanu Lahiri, Krishnomohan Banerjee, Harimohon Sen, Hur Chandra Ghosh, Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, Nilmony Basak, Peary Chand Mitra and Sibchandra Deb. Tarachand and Chandrasekhar belonged to families of little distinction. Tarachand was educated in a free school. Ramgopal's father was a clothier in China Bazar. Ramtanu Lahiri came from Krishnanagar where his family was in the employ of Nadia Raj. Krishnomohan belonged to a very poor Brahman family. Harimohon's family had earned distinction through the qualities of his self-made father, Ramkamal Sen. Harimohon Ghosh belonged to an affluent family of some distinction in the city. Pyarichand Mitra belonged to a family of banians but not of a quite opulent type. Sibchandra Deb came from an established family in Connogore, a large suburban village. Rasik Krishna came of an established commercial family. So did Nilmani who belonged to the declining commercial clan of the Basaks. Dakhsinaranjan was connected with the senior branch of the Tagore family.

The professional orientation of these groups was mainly in the direction of subordinate judicial and executive service. Two other lines were represented by Ramgopal and Ramtanu. Ramtanu became a teacher and Ramgopal a businessmen. The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, mainly active in the forties, had a fair number of medical



students. The case of Ramgopal was exceptional. He had, however, wound up his business towards the end of his career.

For a certain period of time after the introduction of English education, the future of English scholars was somewhat uncertain. This was especially so in the thirties. The material value of new education had not yet been quite established; nor were the social bearings of the new force growing out of the middle layers of metropolitan society. The element of uncertainty in the position of the new social force represented by Young Bengal, created, for a time, an emphatic confrontation between tradition and change in which both can be observed in a scene of graphic exaggeration. This confrontation was not over any particular issue, such as that of *Sati* in an earlier decade or widow remarriage of a later decade. It represented differences in the attitudes of two generations, abruptly brought into focus by an unorthodox education. But it was not simply a conflict between generations. The attachment of the rising groups to new ideas derived its peculiar strength mainly from the freshness of these ideas in a traditional society. The social scene of the thirties, and to some extent also of the forties, acquires a particular liveliness from a continued effervescence of traditional activity, on the one hand, and hectic intellectual activity, with a pronounced tinge of dissent, on the other.

The challenge of Rammohun had given the orthodox forces an opportunity for organization. *Dharma Sabha*, established in 1830, received support from the old opulent families of Calcutta. In the thirties, the Sabha represented an organized effort, on something of a western model, to reinforce traditional practices through, among other things, the instrument of excommunication. The effectiveness of the Sabha, for some time, was striking. But then a certain note of unreality crept into it, indicating the weakness of traditional leadership in metropolitan society.

On a traditional plane, the metropolis continued to be the centre of grand *sradhs*, a typical expression of traditional activity, magnificent marriages and entertainments like *panchalis* and *half-akhrais*. Contemporary journals are full of references to them. The occurrence of the death of a rich and socially celebrated person's parent tended to create a stir not only in the city but also in the districts around. In 1830, the death of Ramgopal Mullick's mother (Ramgopal was the eldest son of Nemycharan Mullick, one of the most opulent Indians in the late 18th century Calcutta) drew a tremendous number of mendicants towards the city. A journal reports that Ramgopal had spent seven lakhs of rupees on his father's *sradh*. At his mother's *sradh* he gave away four Dan Sagars (Oceans of gifts) of which many articles were in gold; "he also gave sixteen *brises* (bulls?), and to the Gosaes (Vaisnava priests) and Brahmins, shawls and embroidery and goldrings. . . . But he was disgraced because of his inability to cope with the immense crowd of beggars who created chaos." The paper comments on the improverishment and disgrace of opulent persons overwhelmed under the pressure of suppliants on such occasions. But the tradition continued. In 1838, at the *sradh* of Asutosh



Dey's mother (Asutosh Dey was a son of the rich banian Ramdulal), there was the same combination of lavishness and confusion. In 1846, the *Englishman* reports a grand *sradh* on which two lakhs of rupees had been spent. "The Babu presented to the Brahmins a large elephant a beautiful horse, a nice looking Palankeen in addition to several gold and silver articles and valuable Cashmere shawls".

At marriages in rich families large number of pundits, ghataks, and Kulins continued to be invited. On festive or religious occasions, the traditional *yatras* and rhyme combats were held.

A certain change had, however, been coming over the pattern of entertainments and festivals. The Durga Puja, essentially a domestic festival, had even before the thirties, taken an Anglo-Bengali character with *nautches* and parties attended by Europeans. The Kabi songs and combats of the late 18th century growth had been declining as a genre of entertainment. Experiments in the theatre were receiving public approval. The steady urban orientation of entertainments was a noticeable feature of this period.

The slow and often subterranean processes of change worked in various ways. An instance of the encroachment of change on orthodoxy is furnished by popular acceptance of wheat grinding mill in 1829. The introduction of artificial dissection passed off almost peacefully in 1833. The orthodox forces themselves had taken a leading part in the growth of English education. The *Dharma Sabha* itself had brought together castes widely separated in traditional hierarchy—Kayasthas, Subarnabaniks, Brahmins and Firali Brahmins.

The cumulative effect of these changes on the defence and patronage of tradition was far from being immediately felt. The challenge of Rammohan had strengthened the defence mechanism of traditional society and the failure of the movement for the revocation of anti-*Sati* legislation had accentuated defensive reaction. The new Brahmo Samaj was in the doldrums after Rammohan's departure and that had added to the confidence of the orthodox group. In such a situation the Young Bengal felt a sense of isolation that for some time exaggerated their reaction. The ardour of Young Bengal for the ideological implications of English education, though often of an adolescent character, acquired a striking seriousness in the society of the thirties in view of a sharp differentiation of groups. The basic concern of Young Bengal was with some abstract ideas, chiefly the right of independent thinking. The family priest, the family deity, the large mass of traditionalists led by old opulent families and guided sometimes by uneducated Brahmins, constituted a force, whose impact on society was constantly felt, especially by the young students and graduates of the Hindu College. It was a galling sensation to obey the dictates of a family priest in the matter of personal beliefs and convictions. The strength of this sensation led them into attacks on traditional Hinduism. Rasik Krishna Mullick's open denial of sanctity of the Ganges, Radhanath Sikdar's insistence on beef eating ('Beef eaters are never bullied'), Ram-



gopal Ghose's refusal to undergo *prayaschitta* or penance, the saucy school boy's cavalier treatment of a Hindu Goddess (Good Morning, Madam) become comprehensible in the context of the period. It is quite fitting that this period was dominated by the personality of Derozio, whose death in 1831 did not diminish his influence. His radicalism was essentially one of ideas, and belonging as he did outside the Hindu society,—he was a Eurasian—retained a kind of detachment from the institutions and values of that society.

The conflicts of the thirties were too strong to last in a society that was not exposed to any basic change in the fundamental social institutions. Even during the height of the Young Bengal revolt, the rebels faced the dilemma between family and freedom. Attachment to family was even then a strong force, loyalty to which was abandoned only in extreme circumstances. The new education was affecting almost exclusively the traditionally literate castes. It did not involve any serious challenge to the caste structure.

A basic factor in the Young Bengal revolt must have been a strong sense of isolation in a society still dominated by old entrenched families like those of 18th century origin. The increasing number of English educated people in the forties was dispelling the former sense of isolation. The combination of orthodox and rich people, represented specially by the *Dharma Sabha*, was declining in influence. The recognition by the Government of the pre-eminence of English in official and judicial matters made English education respectable from the late thirties. With the growing respectability of English education, the educated community started settling down into a secure position in society and tended to form what may be described as a 'middle class' society.

At a later stage, a social analyst describes this process of transition as a progress towards compromise and homogeneity. Writing about the effects of English education, he comments :—"Literature cannot disorganize society. If the one factitious thing called literature had any tendency to disorganize society, the many necessities of existence are so inimical to disorder that the tendency cannot but be extremely short lived. . .". He describes the change from old orthodoxy to educated heterodoxy as a 'change in Idea and Taste'. "And as a change in Idea", continues the observer, "unaccompanied by a contrariety of practice, is a change confined exclusively to the mind of the individual, in whom it has been accomplished, it cannot be a case of social discord or disorganization. At any rate it cannot be a change of a very offensive character". A change in tastes, too, he remarks, is seldom a case of social discord. In the opinion of the social analyst, "certain circumstances were wanting which have a tendency to counteract, in a material degree, the disorganizing influence of the study of English. As time is rolling on, the other generation of Hindus is declining in number and, what amounts to the same thing, is declining in social activity and thus homogeneity in ideas and tastes is becoming wider and wider."



The idea of homogeneity and compromise may be, however, misleading, if it is interpreted to mean a uniformity of pattern and a complete stabilization in society. In Young Bengal days, social change had not been extensive or deep enough to lead to a uniformly stabilized situation. The period following the Young Bengal days saw several phases of the growth of the Brahmo movement, causing fresh tensions in certain areas of metropolitan society. The widow remarriage movement caused a brief but powerful stir. Later still, the question of Kulin polygamy provoked a tremor of social conscience. One feature of the new social movements was their comparatively extensive character. The Brahmo movement penetrated into certain interior regions, especially the growing 'mufussil' towns. The agitation of public mind over the widow remarriage question was also not a mere metropolitan phenomenon and was reflected even in popular songs in the interior. But the vast traditional society was at the same time exerting its powerful pull, the metropolis being increasingly subjected to it with the growing formalization of English education and the narrowing lines of the growth of the Bengali metropolitan community.

The equation of heterodoxy and new education had ceased to be valid even by the late forties of the 19th century. In 1846 quite a stir was created in Calcutta by Debendranath Tagore's refusal to worship Salgram-sila (the stone symbolising Narayan) at the obsequies of his father Dwarkanath. The application of the monotheistic principle to social rites was resisted by Radhakanta Deb and Prasannakumar Tagore. The latter had been a follower of Rammohun Roy and benevolent observer of Young Bengal movement in the late twenties and thirties.

A distinction was made between intellectual or spiritual principles and social conventions. Debendranath was advised not to deviate from the traditional practice in social observances. Debendranath himself was not rejecting the social character of the Hindu obsequies. He distributed gifts among the Brahmins. But he insisted on performing the sacraments according to the monotheistic principles of the Upanishads. His keen awareness of Hindu traditions and a spirited defence of these traditions against the challenge of Christianity at a critical moment obscured the significance of this controversy. Later on (1861), the step taken by Debendranath led to a revision of Hindu sacraments for Brahmo usage.

In the mid-19th century, Brahmoism was still a very fluid concept. It stood basically for an intellectual and spiritual attitude. Debendranath himself was intrinsically attached to such an approach to Brahmoism, because of the natural reserve and caution of his character. But to hold on to some principle with a certain degree of consistency demands some approximation in practice. Even in the conservative stage of its evolution, roughly in the fifties, the inner core of the Brahmo Samaj, because of changed attitude towards the sacraments and to the status and education of women, was slowly drifting towards the position of a social group somewhere on the fringe of Hindu society. It was a position of some isolation, which was sought to be minimised by what came to be called the Adi (old)



Brahmo Samaj but was accentuated by the 'progressive' wing of the Samaj. This position resulted in a certain deficiency in the fibre of the Brahmo Samaj after the rebellious force of Keshab Sen's movement had subsided by the end of the third quarter of the 19th century.

In a basically traditional society where there had been little structural change, Brahmoism represented essentially the force of ideas—ideas born mainly of new education and to some extent, also of the new urban set-up. Both ideas and urbanism suffered from some incongruity with the deeply laid traditional forces. From the point of view of a non-Brahmo, Brahmoism represented a measure of unreality, a feeling not unoften expressed in the strengthening media of traditionalist forces late in the 19th century. The isolation of the Brahmos, virtually as an endogamous social group, helped the forces of tradition to consolidate themselves in the great bulk of the growing urban Hindu educated community. The social observer in the *Hindoo Patriot*, described the dominant spirit as one of 'healthy conservatism'. The observer did not deny that Hinduism had received a shock from English education. But, in his opinion, it was equally true that Hinduism, in its larger sense, embraced a variety of customs and usages which would survive on the strength of the 'sympathy they had been able to evoke from the heart and intellect'.

The attachment to customs and usages of the traditional society underlay the growth of a kind of neo-conservatism—a force that gathered increasing strength with the progress of the 19th century. The logical implications of an unorthodox English education were largely offset by existing social realities. The defence of tradition in this situation was not merely an abstract intellectual stance but proceeded from the objective core of society, represented, in the final analysis, by the family. The dualism in the pattern of behaviour, within and outside the family circle, of impetuous Young Bengal in the heady days of early English education was noticed and commented upon in a leading Bengali journal in the thirties. It may be maintained that English education and the other new forces in urban environment were eating away some of the traditional defences of society and had demonstrated, even in the early 19th century, the virtual ineffectiveness of the traditional machinery of excommunication and were clear signs of the weakening of the coercive power of caste as an organization.

The continuity of tradition and its hold on the broad mass of educated town-dwelling Bengalis in the late 19th century often found expression in a conscious assessment of traditional domestic values. The tensions within the traditional family system and the forces of cleavage might have been sharpened but the joint family adapted itself to the situation. In the course of being transplanted from rural to urban Bengal, the traditional family system lost some of its complexities of blood relationship. Joint responsibility for the land, need for sharing the family home and the force of rural public opinion imparted a compulsive character to the joint family system in rural Bengal. The element of option and choice in living toge-



ther, an element whose presence might not have been consciously felt by most people, was a new urban phenomenon. The general tendency in urban Bengal was towards the formation of smaller joint families. At an advanced stage of its development, the process was thus described by a correspondent to the Sadler Commission:

"The majority of students who flock to the schools and colleges belong to the orthodox middle classes. Most of these families still live in the villages. Since the introduction of English education, however, there has been a regular influx of Bhadrolok classes towards the metropolis or to one or other of the 'mafassal' towns. They have been attracted thither by the new openings created by the British administrative machinery, so that people who were in the past content to live and die within the surroundings of their own village, have, in order to share the life of the metropolis, transformed themselves into an urban society which is composed of lawyers, doctors, engineers, school masters, clerks and officials. Many of these, however, have not yet cut off ties with the original village homes. The temporary house in town is called 'basha', the word 'bari' (home) being confined to the ancestral home in the village. It is in the latter (unless economic considerations stand on the way) that marriages, *sradhs* (ceremonial offerings to the dead) and other family rites are preferably celebrated; it is there that the holidays are spent; it is there that family gods are enshrined and worshipped throughout the year. Economic considerations and the difficulties of communication are, however, effecting a change here also. There is an increasing tendency to cut off all ties with the village and to convert the town residence, into a new home. Even in these cases, however, there persists a sentimental tie with the old village".

A typical Hindu home, the correspondent remarked, was a composite structure. At the head there was often the old grand-father or grand-mother. Then there were the sons of the house, who were the earning members of the family. The grand-father continued to be the head of the family, although he might have ceased to earn. Neither marriage nor settling down in life raised the question of a son's leaving his parental home. Even where he had to spend the best part of the year away from the central home, he regarded himself as belonging to it and contributed to the joint income of the family. The grand parents represented the orthodox tradition. Their indulgence to grand-children never went so far as to conflict violently with their most cherished ideas.

The father of the family belonged in most cases to one of the learned professions or to the machinery of administration. He had had his education in English schools and colleges. Perhaps, in his youth the intoxication of the new culture threw him off his balance and drew him into the ranks of social and religious revolutionaries. But, since those days, he had married and settled down in life. He had had children and his real experience of life. This experience and the suitable income derived from his occupation had sobered him down. If he had really come into close



contact with western ideas, he led a two-fold life, his intellectual life that was fed by the memories of Byron and Shelley, of Mill, Macaulay and Bentham, and his family life fed by domestic affections and protected from external shocks by an indulgent and amused compliance with the forms and rigours of old social order.

The process may be described as a kind of adjustment within the traditional family system. It is thus significant that beside the polemics over the social reform movements, a steady trend of thinking about domestic values is clearly discernible in 19th century social thought. In the middle of the 19th century, the two most vocal representatives of political and social thought in Bengal, Harish Mukherjee and Grish Ghosh, made an emphatic defence of the basic values of the traditional domestic system. Both of them stood for new heterodoxy against old orthodoxy and in this respect, were clearly linked with the rationalist traditions of Young Bengal. But they leave no doubt about their attachment to what they considered to have been the ideals underlying the joint family system.

Harish Mukherjee refers specifically to the state of family property which ensures maintenance to all members of a family, born and unborn. Grish Ghosh had an unfortunate personal experience with his co-perceners in an old Calcutta joint family. But, for all his antipathy to the joint family system as a mere living together of co-parceners, he showed a deep appreciation of "the domestic feelings and affection of the Hindu, his pure benevolent love of kith and kin, the result doubtless of caste and the isolated condition of family life" (he wrote in 1866).

The powerful hold of positivism on late 19th century Bengali thought was clearly in favour of the traditional family system. The most representative thinker of this group, Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, makes a characteristic defence of the traditional family system. He points out that the joint family system deserves serious study as a Hindu experiment in the solution of the poverty problem. The peculiarity of the joint family system, the writer continues, is that the members are actuated not so much by a regard for personal and material advantages as by a natural and disciplined attachment to the blood tie and the mutual bond of affection. The writer admits certain drawbacks of the joint family system, particularly so far as they affect the relations between the husband and his wife. He takes advice of individualist ideas that are affecting filial or fraternal relations. "We should", he suggests, "devote attention to the subject in order to point out how the ends of communism, so long established, may be satisfied consistently with relieving the existing strain upon the conjugal relations of the Hindus".

A particularly interesting appraisal of the traditional domestic values occurs in Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's *Paribarik Prabandha*, (1888) or *Essays on Family Matters*. Bhudeb was one of those unusual personalities who sought to mould his way of life according to some clearly understood principles. He was concerned primarily with the value of tradi-



tional ideals for family happiness. His definition of a joint family did not imply 'jointness' of property. Rather he was in favour of a clear division of parental property between brothers to forestall future bitterness. This would preserve the bonds of affection and love, enshrined, in his view, in the 'ancestral ideal' which is represented by the 'image of parents in the hearts of children'. Bhudeb advised that the traditional bonds of consanguinity should be respected for their contribution to social happiness. For Bhudeb, Hindu society had passed the purely clan stage of social development but it had not widened to the extent western society had. Relations with kinsmen had a special utility in Hindu society.

In his approach to conjugal relationship, he was essentially in favour of mutual understanding and respect. But Bhudeb was almost uncompromisingly in favour of child marriage, which, in his view, was the best insurance of conjugal happiness. He expressed his deep admiration for the traditional ideal of chastity, which, in his view, impelled voluntary self-immolation in the past (*satidaha*). The essence of womanhood consisted for him in sweet flowerlike qualities. In his mind the child bride represented the embodiment of these qualities. The standards Bhudeb endeavoured to set demanded a degree of sensibility far from common in society. Yet they had clear links with the pragmatic concept of 'desachar' or prevailing social norms, which, purged of its grossest elements represented, for Bhudeb, the standard of social conduct. Child marriage was the prevailing social custom; it was believed to have contributed to family stability and, therefore, to happiness. So child marriage was necessary. But a purely utilitarian view of child marriage is not enough. Society needed and did have an ideal in the concept of the flowerlike qualities of womanhood, which were believed to have been embodied in the child bride. In the growing metropolitan society of orthodox middle classes, open no doubt to slow and often imperceptible processes of change, the institution of Hindu marriage, so far as it represented a kind of social idealism, appears to have caught the imagination of the great majority of educated men.

The great controversy over the Age of Consent Bill of 1891, which proposed to raise the age of consent of girls from ten to twelve, demonstrated the remarkable grip of tradition on the great bulk of the educated community in the metropolis. The progressive Brahmos supported the Bill and the Brahmo journal *Indian Mirror* tried to rally the educated community in defence of the measure. The progressive Brahmos, however, made little impression on the educated community outside the pale of Brahmoism. The *Indian Mirror* recognized the strength of opposition and faithfully reported all protest meetings against the Bill. A particularly striking protest meeting was that organised by the graduates of Calcutta and at the Star Theatre, which was 'packed to its utter capacity'. Similar meetings of educated people were held in different parts of the city and the attendance of medical and law graduates was particularly noticeable.



The attitude of the *Hindoo Patriot*, still fairly representative of educated opinion, reflects deep convictions in certain matters of tradition and custom. In the opinion of the *Patriot* Hindu marriage law imposes an obligation on guardians to marry their female wards and a corresponding disability on girls in exercising their right to marry on their own initiative. *Sampradan* is fundamental in Hindu marriage. The Hindu religious law of marriage would be overturned the moment it was made to hinge on the girl's consent, ignoring the disability referred to. Raising the marriageable age of girls will have serious repercussions on the Hindu joint family. "Hindu society is so constituted", remarks an influential leader of the traditional school, "that early marriage is a necessary institution for the preservation of our social order. Its abolition would destroy the system of joint family and caste".

The defence of child marriage in the leading Bengali journals, the *Education Gazette* (a Bengali journal with an English name) and the *Dainik O Samachar Chandrika*, is at times highly interesting for the manner in which it clarifies a vital aspect of social history, that is, what the average educated people tended to think about their social milieu. "It is the object of the Hindu Sastras, asserts the *Dainik O Samachar Chandrika*, "that a girl should, after her marriage, merge herself completely in her husband's family and begin to look upon that family as being nearer and dearer to her than her father's family. The Hindu girl must, after her marriage, become merged in her husband and become one with him. . . . How can this fusion be possible without early mutual association."

In the context of the prevalent state of mind, the failure of the widow remarriage movement was a normal development. A contemporary journal thus describes it:

"The movement about the remarriage of widows has been a failure. Vidyasagar lived to see that failure. We can never forget the shock he gave to society in Bengal by his first book in support of the legality of remarriage. . . . The task. . . . that Vidyasagar proposed to himself, to prove the legality of such marriages from the ancient Dharma Shastras, could be productive of no practical results".

The defence of the Hindu institution of marriage, though it rose from the core of society, was yet somewhat magnified in pitch. In its encounter with the West, the educated Bengali community felt deep admiration for western achievements in the material and intellectual spheres. But the other side of his mind resented this western superiority and sought for some compensatory phenomenon in Indian tradition that could, to some extent, match western superiority and encourage self-respect. The institution of child marriage was being slowly undermined by the compulsion of the economic position of the middle classes or 'bhadroluk' who were dependent finally on professions and services. The limited opportunities of good employment, and especially the fear of unemployment, in the face of expanding education system, tended to create some misgivings



about early marriage. The Report on the Census of Bengal for 1901 refers to a noticeable rise in the age at marriage among the 'Bhadroluk' class in Bengal. The 'Bhadroluk' families were making the utmost effort towards educating their sons to the highest degree and to help them face the deepening problems of life.

The educated Bengali, for all his genuinely conservative attitude, was still a product of more than half a century of change, however limited in character. The background of social movements and tensions over social questions from Rammohan to Vidyasagar, did contribute significant, though not always tangible, elements to the educated Bengali's mental make-up and also to his way of life. The process had been making itself felt also in the interior of Bengal. The Young Bengal had challenged and had virtually destroyed priestly influence on educated mind and processes of thinking. The progressive Brahmos had defied some of the basic traditions. The universally respected man in late 19th century society in Bengal was Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, the Great Dissenter of the era.

But exposure to change of the kind that followed mainly from new education, which created qualifications for professional services and only very partially from the new urban set-up was hardly enough to neutralise the process which may be said to have been leading the middle class society to a kind of impasse. A general awareness of the problems of middle class existence pervades the journals of the late 19th century. The general tone is strikingly different from the robust optimism of the *Bengal Spectator* and *Gyananneshan* the Young Bengal journals, and the hopeful economic outlook represented by *Samachardarpan*, the leading Bengali journal of the thirties and forties.

In an article captioned 'The Problems of Life in Bengal', the *Hindoo Patriot* refers to several factors responsible for the deterioration in middle class economic position. The *Patriot* considered that the rising prices of agricultural produce had immensely increased the cost of food and curtailed the resources of a single bread winner of a family for the support of numerous hangers-on, who have been consequently thrown adrift. It observed that English education and contact with Englishmen had created certain 'artificial' wants, which those who had imbibed English notions and feelings, had not the means to meet. 'Education, medication and social intercourse had become far more expensive than before. . . . The future, we must confess, is gloomy. The number of educated men is annually increasing by thousands, and how are they to live? The sort of education given to them chiefly qualifies them for government employ or employments analogous to it and that field is already overcrowded. Agriculture and trade are the only hope of the people, but unfortunately the men who come out of the schools and colleges, have no experience in agriculture while they have not the necessary capital for trade'.



In another article, entitled 'The Middle Classes,' the *Hindoo Patriot* discusses the same question. The *Patriot* again refers to the increasing cost of food, due among other things 'to the cultivation of cash crops like jute, to the stimulation of the export of food from one part of the country to another, and to the fall in the price of silver'. The *Patriot* observed that it was the middle classes which had been chiefly suffering from the enhancement of prices and the absence of suitable employment. The weakening ties of the joint family which almost systematically 'maintained the idle with the earnings of the active', the progressive diminution of the 'ancestral acres' with steady numerical expansion of people dependent on them, were undermining the base of the middle classes, traditionally dependent on them. Great anxiety is felt in settling the children. Marriage had become expensive and if a man had to marry three or four daughters he was not infrequently ruined. The settlement of sons was still more difficult.

The *Hindoo Patriot*, as the organ of an association of the more affluent section of Bengali society, could only partially represent the intensity of this trend in middle class thinking. In journals like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Sadharani*, the files of which are easily available, an intense awareness of the middle class dilemma in the 19th century, speaks, more than any figures can do, for the growth of a pattern of society that was almost peculiarly Bengali. No other concept applies to it better than the indigenous concept of 'Bhadroluk'. The substitution of the term 'middle class' is permissible only because the term itself is highly elastic; but, outside the western context, an indigenous term is always a better approximation to reality.

The 'Bhadroluk' was in no sense an exclusive product of the 19th century. But the 19th century may be said to have done almost the same thing to him that the Victorian age did to the English middle class. In the peculiar social evolution of Bengal, 'bhadroluk' meant primarily the high caste Hindu gentry of Bengal and was applied to other sections of society, or rather to individuals and persons belonging to those sections, only by analogy. Here there is a broad qualitative difference from the western concept of middle class. The second point of difference is more quantitative. The great bulk of the Bengali 'bhadroluk' partook of the character of rural gentry. The nineteenth century had been adding some new dimensions to the phenomenon of 'bhadroluk', a new middle class dimension being represented by professional men like lawyers and doctors. Pressure on land or ancestral acres might have been creating a kind of 'agrarian crisis' for the Bengali gentry, strengthening the process of migration to the towns or the metropolis. But the major component element of the 'bhadroluk' community still remained rural.

In the metropolis, the Bengali middle class had no real working class or even labouring class base, spontaneously developing from Bengali society. The pattern of migration of workers or labourers to Bengal's



metropolis shows the essentially weak trend of migration of working population from Bengal districts. The metropolis or rather the metropolitan complex of Bengal, did not become an area where any significant degree of communication could develop between the component parts of its population. The absence of a large and substantial Bengali working class, which could indeed develop, given the requisite degree of migration from rural Bengal, even within the limited industrial complex of the late 19th century, appears to have had a certain etiolating effect on the Bengali middle class. This was particularly evident in the great bulk of the 'bhadroluk' community which had become indigenous to Calcutta and its neighbourhood.

The labouring class base of the metropolitan society had from the inception of the metropolis been influenced by the peculiar nature of migration to the city. Even as early as the late 18th century the palanquin bearers of Calcutta were almost all natives of Orissa. In the large domestic service base of the metropolitan society (110,000 or nearly  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the inhabitants in 1901) the migration of 'Chasi Kaibartas' (cultivators) from Bengal districts constituted a significant element, but that did not counter the striking disparity in the industrial sector created by the singular weakness of the trend of migration from Bengal districts to the growing industrial areas in and around Calcutta. The growth of the industrial town of Howrah from a congeries of villages in mid-19th century was due almost entirely to migration from Bihar and U.P. Nearly half the inhabitants of Howrah in 1911 were born in the U.P. or the Province of Bihar and Orissa and only 45% spoke Bengali, while 47% spoke Hindi and 3% Oriya. The growth of mill towns in the 24-Parganas similarly owed little to migration from Bengal districts. In Bhatpara (1911) four persons spoke Hindi to each person speaking Bengali, in Titagarh 75% spoke Hindi while 11% spoke Bengali. On a rough calculation 'in most mills two-thirds of the hands were composed of up-countrymen'. In Titagarh, a significant proportion of mill labourers came from the Telugu-speaking region.

The pattern of migration from suburban districts to the metropolis proper does not show any marked tendency on the part of artisans and labouring classes towards migration. The largest single unit of migrants from the suburban districts was composed of high caste people who may be said to have belonged to the class of 'bhadroluk' or gentry. From Bihar and U. P. the migration was almost wholly of labouring castes. The most important element was represented by the Chamars. Almost all the shoemakers and cobblers as also a very large proportion of mill labour were men of this caste. Some of the professional and artisan castes of Bengal similarly failed to supply the metropolitan demand as also the demand in the interior of Bengal, mostly in the cases of washermen and milkmen.

One reasonable explanation of this peculiar nature of migration, especially in the field of industrial labour, may be found in the two



repeatedly emphasised features of Bengal's agricultural economy, namely the comparative smallness of the class of landless agricultural labourers in Bengal and the higher rates of wages of labour in rural Bengal, the comparison being made between Bihar, U. P. and Orissa, on the one hand, and Bengal, on the other. *The Statistical Account of Bengal* which profusely quotes from the reports of district collectors makes frequent reference to the scarcity of labour in Bengal districts, especially those of North and East Bengal. The *Account* describes the situation in the seventies. The census reports of the later period also refer to the scarcity in some detail. The report of 1911 seeks to quantify the phenomenon, though it admits the drawbacks of such quantification.

“Another point which calls for notice is the difference between returns for Bengal, [on the one hand], and Bihar and Orissa, [on the other]. Those dependent on agricultural labour in the latter province are more than twice as numerous as in Bengal, the actual excess being nearly four millions. Some part of the difference may be attributable to the higher standard of census work in Bihar and Orissa: a quarter of a million more persons were entered simply as labourers than in Bengal. [But] the real explanation is that the number of landless field labourers is far greater in Bihar and Orissa than in the richer province of Bengal. The well-to-do Bengali cultivators depend largely on the annual influx of labourers from Bihar and Orissa for reaping their crops, and complaints are frequent of the inadequacy of the supply of local labour. At other seasons of the year, they have a system of mutual exchange of labour and co-operate to work in one another's field in turn. . . .

“In no part of Bihar and Orissa is the percentage of field labourers to the general population less than one-tenth, the minimum being reached in Orissa, which, in this, as in other respects, resembles Bengal. The maximum is reached in Bihar, where over one-fifth of the total population subsists by field labour. In Bengal, on the other hand, the proportion falls to 5 per cent in North Bengal, and to three per cent in East Bengal, where the population consists [chiefly] of Musalmans who till their own fields. It rises above 10% only in West and Central Bengal, where the relatively high figure is probably due to some extent to a higher standard of accuracy. . . .”

The Labour Commission Report of 1896 gives figures of wages of agricultural labour in one district of Bengal, namely Burdwan, where wages were not particularly high by the standard of Bengal, and the rates prevalent in some districts of Bihar and U.P. which formed important sources of supply of labour to Bengal. The following table is taken from the Report:



Rates of monthly wages—in rupees

			1880	1885	1890	1894
Burdwan	...	...	9	8	8	7
Patna	...	...	3 to 4	4 to 5	4 to 5	4 to 5
Muzaffurpur	...	...	2 to 3	3 to 4	3 to 5	3-75 to 5-02
Hazaribagh	...	...	4	3-75	4-5	5 to 6
Cawnpore	...	...	3-87	3-5	4	4 to 5
Mirzapur	...	...	3-25	3-5	3-75	4
Lucknow	...	...	3	4	4	4

In the Report of the Famine Commission the evidence of one of the witnesses (B. C. Basu, Assistant to Director of Land Records and Agriculture, Bengal from 1884 to 1887) points out differences in the wages of agricultural labour in East Bengal and the Bihar districts.

Q. What wages are paid in East Bengal?

Ans. Nowhere less than four annas and sometimes five to six annas. . . About double the wages in Bihar—more than double. And about double what they are in Nadia. The southern part of Nadia is very poor and the wages are very low there." [Reference is to daily wages]

While the lack of sufficient economic incentive to migration was undoubtedly important, an explanation based on purely economic data leaves certain gaps. In the evidence before the Famine Commission quoted above, the following statement regarding the sub-metropolitan district of Nadia deserves notice: "There are more landless labourers in Nadia than in other parts of Bengal. Muchis (cobblers) are an important caste in Nadia. Many are day-labourers. There are large numbers of Nadia labourers in Jessore." And again, "The southern part of Nadia is very poor and the wages are very low there."

It appears from the evidence that the poor of Nadia tended to migrate generally to the Sunderbans, where work was particularly hazardous, rather than to the metropolis, despite its contiguity.

Local labour supply in the suburban region around the metropolis might have also been affected by the ravages of Burdwan fever. The devitalization consequent upon the malarial epidemic of the sixties and seventies, might have made the local labouring population largely unfit for heavy factory work. But this explanation is applicable to a limited region.

One of the forces that created the heterogenous urban "proletariat" of the metropolis and the suburban region was the village kinship system. The labourers from Bihar, Orissa and U.P., who were mainly Hindu, had greater caste and religious scruples than the Bengali villagers. That should have acted as a damper on migration. But this was most probably prevented by a stronger village kinship system than what obtained in Bengal.



The greater rigour and organization of caste in rural Bihar and Uttar Pradesh might have contributed to the strength of the kinship system. The Bengali village was much less compact than the Bihar or U.P. village ; in some districts there was a striking absence of the gregarious spirit and village sites, as in East Bengal. The kinship system remained important in Bengal. But it lacked much of the vigour, strength and organization of areas with powerful traditions of the village community.

The employment of Bengali labour also depended to a certain extent on the attitude of European employers in mills around Calcutta. There was a general impression among them that the Bengali worker lacked the staying power of the Bihari or U.P. worker. This was attributed by some to a deficiency in Bengali character—the Bengali's tendency to avoid heavy physical work for a continuous period of time, sometimes described as 'the habit of shirking'. The conditions of industrial living around Calcutta did not, however, justify the tone of the employers. Yet the Bengali could not perhaps overcome the traditional pattern of work and leisure in rural and agricultural Bengal. A large number of East Bengal peasants went to Arakan and Assam, and peasants from some parts of Central and West Bengal went to the Sunderbans. But the labour was entirely seasonal. Throughout India in the nineteenth century industrial labour retained many of the features of agricultural background. Such features were also present to a marked degree in the Bihari and U.P. workmen in Calcutta, who could never answer the description of 'depeasantized urban proletariat'. For various reasons, some of them discussed here, the agricultural pull worked with a particular intensity on Bengali villagers.

The kinship system and also the system of caste in Bengal appear to have been weaker on a purely economic level than the prevalent systems in more northerly regions. The hypothesis is especially applicable in the mercantile sector of activity in Bengal. The importance of kinship groups and more broadly, of caste groups, in Indian mercantile tradition is obvious. The Indian merchant, except, of course, the unusual Parsee—tended to remain a highly orthodox and conservative element in society. The tradition is noticeable in the case of the Bengali merchant groups in early Calcutta. These groups had a heterogeneous character, unlike the professional commercial groups from outside Bengal—the Oswals, the Agarwals, the Khetris. Kinship, to the opulent elements in Bengal with high caste and somewhat individualistic background, became more a matter of social observance—marriages, family rites, maintenance of poor relatives, etc—than of pure economic activity. The indigenous mercantile groups in Bengal—the Sahas of East Bengal or the Tilis, for example—retained some of the traditions of kinship peculiar to Indian mercantile groups. But in and around the metropolis, they too, were affected by the 'bhadroluk' tradition steadily filtering downwards from the high caste elements in metropolitan society. Part of this tradition was a degree of individualism but not of a character that could give rise to the genuine individual capitalist, except in the unusual case of Dwarkanath Tagore.



If the foregoing analysis is broadly accepted, the 'bhadrolok' community that had grown in the metropolitan region in 19th century Bengal lacked some of the essential features of an urban middle class. It had failed to develop a working-class base ; its original mercantile promise had not been fulfilled.

The census figures for 1881 indicate that a large number of small private industrial concerns were owned by Brahmins and Kayasthas in Calcutta. The castes from which the private owners were mainly drawn were the Kayasthas (65) and Brahmins (61), the Telis and Tilis (28), Sadgops (26) and Marwaris (19). But this can produce a wrong impression. Of the one hundred and five registered companies in Calcutta only seven had Indians as directors, the number of Bengalis in those seven is not specified.

The educated 'Bhadrolok' community in the metropolis did produce men interested in technology and industry. But that interest was not backed by capital and remained largely academic. The small industrial concerns in general could not be as remunerative as inland trade and indigenous banking, of which the great centre was in Burrabazar where the Marwari community had acquired complete hold from the mid-19th century. Among the indigenous bankers in Calcutta in 1906 almost all were Marwaris. The Marwari control over inland trade in two most vital commodities, jute (especially in North Bengal) and cotton piece-goods, had been established by the seventies of the century. The industrial and commercial efforts of the Bengalis during the ensuring Swadeshi period were somewhat quixotic, an interesting description of which occurs in the memoirs of Rabindranath Tagore.

The metropolitan 'middle class' in Bengal furnished the most remarkable example of the operation of education as a force in the formation of a community. The force underlies both the triumph and failure of the Bengali in the 19th century. The radiation of this force from the metropolis outwards into the interior of Bengal created a striking homogeneity of outlook.

The peculiar strength of the force of education in 19th century Bengal finds expression in some of the testamentary documents of early 19th century. Rajmohan Sein of the famous banker family of Seins (the banking house of Mathuramohan Sein) in early Calcutta writes in his will not about the revival of the great banking tradition of the family (the house fell a victim to a speculative crisis in early 19th century) but of the future education of his children.

"Further, when eldest son begins to attend the English college to study, he will get *sicca* twenty seven rupees for the expenses of his studies including the hire for his *palankeen*. Further, when my second son begins to study English, he will get at the rate of *Sicca* ten rupees per month for he expenses of his studies. The *palankeen* that is retained for my eldest son he will use that *palankeen*



and when my third son that attend to study English, then setting aside the arrangements mentioned above, for the purpose of *these three going together to their studies*, my executors will purchase and provide them with a *palankeen* carriage and a horse for the sum of three or four hundred rupees, and paying at the rate of *sicca* twenty-two rupees per month for the said vehicle—as long as my sons attain not severally the age of sixteen years, paying for the expenses of their education at the rate of *sicca* ten rupees per month, they will get my sons educated.”

In another testament dated 1833 Brojonath Mitra instructs his sons :

“You will defray the annual expenses of the Issore Sarodeea Poojah, *etcetra*, and charges for food and clothing of everybody and the monthly wages of the persian Tutor, the School Master and the Gooroo Mahashoya and provide the requisites for writing and pay the expenses of my residence in Benares. . . . My mercantile business that is carried on in Dhurmotollah you two persons will carry on that, if any loss occurs, you will see the result for two or three years and then give it up.’ (A detailed schedule of lands and houses bought by Brojonath, the wine merchant, around Calcutta is attached to the testamentary document.)

History often fails to find adequate documentary material to illustrate even a pervasive social attitude. Such an attitude is taken for granted by the generation under its influence and later generations are deprived of concrete facts for illustration of many of the unspoken but basic beliefs of the past. The two wills cited above are thus of special value. The singular attachment of the Bengali Bhadrolok to education stood for an attitude that tended to infiltrate downwards, notably into some higher artisan castes and the well-to-do peasants. This probably tended to create gaps in the Bengali artisan community, notably in Calcutta. An employer speaks of Bengali carpenters with sons educated upto the matriculation or F. A. level, looking for ‘decent’ employment. While this concentration on education on the part of a whole community or class produced some spectacular results it had, on the whole, a narrowing effect. Education became a kind of ritual and the original dynamic content tended to become progressively circumscribed.

The metropolitan society as a centre of social change thus had some fundamental drawbacks, derived mainly from the character of the Bengali middle class. Yet the logic of urbanism had worked on certain levels to modify the original rural tradition. A noticeable change had occurred so far as commensality was concerned. Commensality played a peculiarly central role in traditional rural society. A Hindu village or rather the Hindu portion of a village, was generally a collection of ‘samajes’ of local communities. The ‘samaj’ has been described, with reasonable accuracy, as “the circle within which the members of a caste or sub-caste usually



dine together on festive or religious occasions." It is pointed out that "every Hindu is under an obligation to feed castemen on certain occasions and those who attend on such occasions constitute the *samaj*. . . ."

A nineteenth century positivist defines commensality as a "right to mess with one's peers." In the internal organization of villages, this was synonymous with village franchise. The right to mess was, however, subject to rules of inter-marriage, which consequently connected franchise with caste. "So long, however, as a man or his wife is not permitted to mess with the rest of the community at his own place, or that of any of them, the family remains outside the communal circle as it is now constituted. A man may become a fellow resident of the same village part of which he may have purchased at auction. . . . and continue to be almost an excrescence in the society."

The mess franchise, according to the writer, consists of two grades having reference to the class of food taken. They may be called first and second class franchise. "Those who held the former, eat of *bhat* (rice) and *roti* (unleavened bread) with suitable accompaniments, cooked or touched by each other, whereas, second class franchise is confined to partaking only of *puri* (fried preparation from wheat flour) *chira* (dried preparation of rice), *dahi* (curd) etc. A third grade may be mentioned and this refers only to drinking water."

... "The closest relation exists between *gnatis*, or blood relations, and this seems to point to some historical connection between the messing relations of village communities and the commensality of family communities. . . . Among *Kulumwas*, however, the relation is less intimate. One of the most important formalities of a marriage is the admission of the bride to the first class franchise, the ceremony observed (*pakaspara*) being her touching the food served to her husband's *gnatis*. The bridegroom, is, of course, admitted to first class franchise in the father-in-law's family, both by marriage and by the dinner which immediately follows. But the relation may be easily broken off. And the messing relation between the bride's father and the father of the bridegroom are not always necessarily of the first class type." Loss of the first and second class franchise amounts to excommunication and, in its extreme form, carries with it the prohibition of intermarriage. The prohibition cannot, for obvious reasons, extend beyond the *samaj*, but it is unusual for one *samaj* to accept the casteaways of another.

The traditional rules of commensality appear to have been first broken by Young Bengal. Dwarkanath Tagore, in the early stage of his association with the English, refrained from dining with them at dinner parties in his own house. Later, when he changed the practice, he had to live in a certain degree of isolation from his family, and his touch was considered to have been ritually impure. In the later decades of the nineteenth century ritualistic and caste restrictions on commensality had almost spontaneously disappeared among educated Bengalis of the metropolis. Digambar Mitra, a highly educated leader of metropolitan society, freely



dined with Muhamadans, Christians and Hindus, who had returned from England. Justice Dwaraknath Mitra dined with the Governor-General and European officials. An interesting description of student messes in the seventies of the nineteenth century shows the extent of change in the matter of commensality even among young men from interior Bengal, who had been pursuing their studies in Calcutta. They had organized their own district messes, like the Tippera mess, the Barisal mess and the Bikrampur mess. "We were a rather mixed lot," comments the writer in describing the Sylhet mess. "Some were orthodox Hindus, though their orthodoxy did not go so far as to prohibit association or interdining, provided the food was cooked by a Brahmin, with those who did not observe the rules of caste. Others were absolutely heterodox and openly violated all the rules of Hinduism in regard to eating and drinking." In a book published by the Standing Committee on the Sea-voyage Question (1894), the promoters refer to the general practice among educated Bengalis to ignore caste restrictions on food, drink and interdining.

In rural Bengal restrictions regarding commensality appear to have held ground. The same individual perhaps followed two different lines of behaviour in respect of food and interdining—a heterodox line in the city or town was not perhaps very difficult to reconcile with the acceptance of orthodox norms in one's native village. A tremendous controversy raged through the rural district of Dacca over the question of excommunicating a group of high caste young men who had taken food from the hands of Muhamadans while travelling on a steamer. Surendranath Banerji's family was excommunicated in his native village after his return from England, mainly under a general assumption that Surendranath had not maintained orthodox caste rules regarding food and interdining. Both these cases, occurring in early seventies, might have been somewhat extreme. Yet they serve to show that even in the seventies rural Bengal still attached great importance to these matters while in urban Bengal the attitude was generally one of connivance. Excommunication, the most effective sanction of traditional society against recalcitrants, tended to lose much of its rigour in metropolitan society.

Yet even in the matter of commensality, urban Bengal was subject to the dichotomy between the male and the female world, which perhaps underlies the whole social development of the nineteenth century. While a considerable degree of freedom had come to characterise urban male behaviour, the inner apartments of the Bengali household continued to maintain firm links with rural tradition. The Brahmo families could overcome this dualism in varying degrees but only in a very limited sphere of society. The social freedom of women appears to have been greater in western and southern India than in Bengal. Bipin Pal, a keen observer of 19th century social scene, writes about this in his *Memories*: "Female education and the freedom of social intercourse and movement of Mahratta ladies was a new and inspiring experience which I had in Bombay. Both the Parsis and the Mahrattas did not observe the *zenana* seclusion or the



*pardah* which is universal among higher class Hindus and Muslims in Bengal and Upper India." This was due to an indigenous tradition which Bipin Pal deeply appreciated. In Bengal, however, the spectacle of leading reformers or public men taking *prayaschitta* or penance for offence against caste orthodoxy was unthinkable; not so in Maharashtra where Gopal Hari Deshmukh, for all his avowed antipathy to priestly influence, had to submit to a penance for attending the marriage ceremony of a widow, and Ranade was forced to do the same thing for attending in 1891, a tea party given by Christian missionaries.

The metropolitan society may thus be said to have responded to some new pressures and forces of urbanization, which tended to acquire many peculiarities following mainly from rural or traditional pull on urban society." So far as the physical growth of Calcutta is concerned the city had made rapid strides in area and population. The early population estimates are not quite reliable but they are of interest in indicating a trend towards growth. The writer of *A Short History of Calcutta* comments, after a comparative study of figures, that the actual population of the settlement in 1710 was not more than 10,000 to 12,000 souls. He describes this figure as an 'approximate guess'. A reasonably acceptable figure from a later date is the figure of population arrived at the Police Census of 1837. The figure was 229,714. At the official census in 1876, the figure was 409,036. In 1901, the official census estimate was at 562,686. During the late 19th century the growth of town area and houses took to the following pattern:—

				Town area in acreage			Houses	
				Urban	Rural	Total	Pucka	Kutcha
1876	...	...	...	3,754	1,283	5,037	16,896	22,860
1881	...	...	...	3,754	1,283	5,037	15,128	19,406
1891	...	...	...	11,850	1,283	13,133	26,070	47,351
1901	...	...	...	11,954	1,283	13,237	40,342	79,027

Thus even the Town Proper, as distinguished from the Suburbs, had a quite identifiable rural acreage. The rural character was naturally more pronounced in the suburbs. As regards the sub-metropolitan districts of the 24-Parganas, Howrah, Hughly and Nadia, they had been exposed to the process of physical change in certain pockets, though the intensely agrarian character of the hinterland neutralized the social impact of industrialism to a point where it loses much of its significance for contemporary Bengali society. The pattern of migration to these industrial centres, among other things, shows the weakness of Bengal's response to this force.

Outside the limits of the metropolitan and sub-metropolitan region, the force of urbanism generally tended to create 'rural towns' which were



mainly centres of country trade and regional administration. In the census report of 1911 the difficulty in distinguishing between an overgrown village and a small town is pointed out. "The main point of difference", it is remarked in the report, "lies in the occupations of the people, for a town is a centre of trade or at least has shops catering for the wants of the inhabitants and of the surrounding villages or it is a place where the majority of the residents are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. In the villages, however, the majority are devoted to agriculture. . . . As a rule the village is purely residential and shops are few and far between." It is not, however, clear why the census report does not mention the administrative centres—the district or sub-divisional towns—which, socially speaking, had certain qualities lacking in the basically market towns.

The inland market towns were also a feature of the economy of 17th-18th century Bengal. Among such towns were Malda, Dacca and Rajmahal. By the end of the 18th century these centres had undergone a period of rapid decline from which Dacca recovered in the second half of the 19th century through the growth of jute trade. The city of Dacca in the early 19th century perhaps bore a very close resemblance to the traditional type of market town in Bengal. The following description is, therefore, of some interest.

"The town itself is built on the bank of the river (Buriganga) ; along with its streets, bazars and lanes it extends to a distance of four miles in length, and about a mile and a quarter in breadth. It is intersected in its interior by a branch of the Dolai Creek. The Chauk or market place lies at the west end of the town and near the river bank. It is a square of pretty large dimensions, surrounded by mosques and shops. The open space in which the bazar is held is confined within a low wall, with a carriage road round it. The numerous streets which intersect the town are extremely narrow and crooked and only a few are wide enough for wheeled carriages. . . The houses facing the streets. . . are from one to four stories in height."

An interesting feature of Dacca till even the first decade of this century was a compact community organization among the Muslims of non-*ashraf* category which dealt with problems of social discipline and upto a point, even civil justice among them. Such an organization might have also characterised the artisan castes like the Sankharis who have left a tradition of compact living in Dacca. From the topographical data of the old city of Dacca, it may appear that as an established commercial city of the traditional type, Dacca represented a highly advanced stage of the growth of cellular organizations on the basis of caste, community and professional groups.

The chief incentive to the growth of market towns in nineteenth century Bengal was the jute trade and, to some extent, also the larger



ramification of trade in Bengal rice. The general impression given by the new market towns was their comparatively floating character, as distinguished particularly from Dacca.

From the point of view of social history, the district or sub-divisional towns had certain distinctive qualities. The physical character of a normal specimen of this century is described in the memoirs of his childhood years by an autobiographer. "Kishorganj", he writes, "was only a normal specimen of its class—one among a score of collections of tin-and-mat huts or sheds, comprising courts, offices, schools, shops and residential buildings, which British administration had raised up in the green and brown spaces of Eastern Bengal. . . ." The municipal towns of interior Bengal—Kishorganj was a municipal town with a population of 16,000 in 1911—generally had a nucleus of schools, courts, offices and markets surrounded by an absolutely rural region. The towns had a sprawling character and the figures of population tended to give a wrong impression of the real character of the towns. Such a description would apply almost equally to the newly growing towns in other regions of Bengal. In Burdwan, a district quite close to the metropolis, "eight large towns were returned in the Census Report [of 1871] but "the towns can hardly be considered urban in the strict sense of the word, consisting as they do of blocks of villages grouped together for municipal purposes. The city of Burdwan itself is made up of 93 little villages, lying close to each other and surrounding the town proper—the whole group constitutes the Burdwan Municipality. . . ."

A society, however, grew in these interior towns with certain distinctive features of its own. A large concentration of gentry from often widely separated regions tended to infuse an element of heterogeneity into the society of those towns. A field was created in which a wider extent of social freedom could develop. The influence emanating from the metropolis could find in these towns an opportunity for making itself felt. Some of the progressive metropolitan movements, for example, the movement started by the advanced wing of the Brahmos, had significant repercussions among the gentry of some of these towns.

A more detailed treatment of rural towns or the new market towns and administrative centres in interior Bengal would have served better to illustrate how rural Bengal was exposed to the pressure of urbanism and metropolitan influence in the 19th century and how this force was modified and partly neutralized in the vast agrarian and rural set-up. But apart from the influence of urbanism, rural society was exposed to pressures both from within and without, though here, too, as in the case of urban centres, an exaggerated emphasis on the forces of change, following from the presumption of a disruption of traditional set-up, will be very misleading indeed.

The agrarian society presents complexities of such a character that an attempt to locate the forces of change in it and their relation to the traditional set-up may be baffling on many points.



One very familiar effect of the revenue experiments of the 18th century and the sale law of the Permanent Settlement on the traditional set-up was the ruin of many old zamindars with consequent changes in the power structure in rural Bengal. A striking illustration of decline of old families is the case of the Chandradvip Rajas of Bakhraganj, called the 'Basu dynasty', who had control of the greater part of the district of Bakhraganj. The estate was sold for arrears of revenue in 1799. The largest share went to the grocer (*mudi*) of the Raja. The other purchasers were two Armenians and one Dal Singh of Dacca. The Armenians, however, could not long retain control over the property.

The classic case of decline, however, was that of the Rajas of Natore and Nadia, who held a unique social position in eighteenth century society. The estates of the Natore Raj, according to tradition, were worth fifty-two lakhs in mid-eighteenth century. The estates were then in the hands of Rani Bhabani, the widow of Raja Ramkanta Roy. That pious lady was continually spending her money in endowment of idols and established in Benares alone three hundred and eighty temples, guest houses and other religious edifices. Her adopted son, Raja Ram Krishna Roy, was exceedingly pious and spent his whole time in performing religious duties. Unlike his mother, he forsook all wordly affairs and the zamindaris began to go to ruin. His servants began to plunder him on every side and then came the Permanent Settlement. Within a decade, the Raja of Natore had lost all his estates except only three which produced three lakhs instead of the original fifty-two lakhs.

In the district of Jessore where the Natore Raj had a large portion of their zamindari, the largest purchasers of the disintegrating estates was Kalisankar Roy, the ancestor of the Narail family of Jessore. He was a *dewan* of the Raja of Natore and it was partly, if not chiefly by unjust stewardship, that he managed to acquire the estates. Among the other purchasers were the Tagores of the Senior Branch, who had amassed a fortune mainly as banians. Another purchaser, Krishna Pal, originally a petty trader, acquired a large fortune almost by accident. He increased it by trading and almost monopolising the trade in salt, which at that time was sold by auction at the Board of Revenue and at last purchased a large zamindari in Jessore. The Gossains of Serampore, originally a priestly family who had made much money by trading with the Danes at Serampore in Hughly, also purchased a share. The Paikpara Raj family which acquired a portion of estates in Jessore was resident originally at Kandi in Murshidabad and then at Paikpara near Calcutta. The family had made its fortune through association with the British. The Ghoshal family of Bhokylas (near Calcutta), the founder of whose fortune had acquired great wealth in trade, also became zamindars in Jessore.

The decline of Nadia Raj can also be similarly illustrated. A very important factor in their decline must have been social and religious expenditure of fantastic proportions about which traditions are quite eloquent.



The estates of the Dinajpur Raj in North Bengal fell a victim to external mechanism. In the first decade of the 19th century "the greater number of the landlords in Dinajpur were 'new men' who, formerly, were either merchants, manufacturers, agents of landlords or officers of government. The last category of people was 'not numerous,' People who were not afraid of them would call them 'lotders or fellows who have purchased lots.'"

Buchanan in his account of Dinajepore considered the new zamindars to be more efficient managers of their estates than the old Raj family, whose estates were in a state of disintegration and decay. Yet, he remarks, the old Raj family 'is very much respected, for people submit with patience to many things from a power to which they are accustomed, that would grieve them to endure from a person of whom they know nothing, or whom they remember as their equals.'

One effect of the Permanent Settlement was the substitution of smaller zamindars for bigger ones in many areas. At the time of the Settlement there were only 122 estates in the whole district of Jessore held direct from Government. All of them fell into arrears in the decade following the Settlement and were sold to the highest bidders in small shares. By the turn of the century the 122 large estates were converted into 5,044 small zamindaris. "It has been described as a consequence of the Settlement that small Zamindars and small Zamindaris came to be substituted for great Zamindaris. It was, however, natural that of these small Zamindars some should increase substance above others, and by buying up Zamindari after Zamindari and tenure after tenure. . . [develop] in the end into a very large estate. Such estates differ entirely in this nature from the old Zamindaris. They are not compact or single estates, extending over some tract of territory where their owner is present as the great Zamindar, but they are an accumulation of separate and separately held tenures, acquired in different ways and at different times, held under all sorts of different rights and scattered here and there over the country. Zamindari in fact has become more of a profession and less of a position."

Yet, while many of the old families lost a very large part of their estates, they ultimately retained control over some and exerted an influence quite out of proportion to their physical resources. The case of the Chandradvip Rajas is rather unusual. The impact of the new sale law was, moreover, far from uniform and in north and eastern Bengal, many old families of rank remained reasonably steady after being shaken for a while.

The intrusion of a somewhat harsh business-like spirit represented by the *lotdars* and *nilamdars* as contrasted with the old slow moving *rajas* and zamindars of old, brought about a change partly neutralized by the force of old traditions. The new absentee zamindars were often far removed from the social life of the villages. But not all of them were urban landlords. Among the purchasers of the Natore estates, The Narail family lived in the village of Narail in Jessore and played a definite role in the society of rural Jessore. The Dighapatia family, another bene-



ficiary of the disintegration of Natore estates in Rajshahi, was similarly resident in the village Dighapatia in Rajshahi. In the first half of the nineteenth century many newly rich families tended to reside in ancestral villages and had significant influence on the socio-economic structure of those villages. The old 'aristocratic' norms also tended to influence their social behaviour. It may be said that while forces in the shape of new revenue-judicial system and new landlordism were creating havoc in the traditional set-up, a process of continuity was maintained and both were like two parallel phenomena in rural Bengal.

A most significant change in the agrarian structure definitely followed from the wide ramification of the system of subinfeudation in the districts of Bengal. Here, too, the local variations in the working of this new pressure have been quite complex and can be worked out only after a detailed and specialized study of the problem. In some districts of Bengal like Rangpur and Mymensingh the pressure of sub-infeudation had been rather weak. In the traditionally settled districts of Bengal like Burdwan and Hughly the pressure worked with great intensity but did not attain the peculiar complexity of the East Bengal district of Bakharganj, where the process of settlement in newly formed and reclaimed regions introduced a peculiar factor in the agrarian situation. A very obvious social effect of the process of subinfeudation had been an unusual strengthening of the class of 'rural gentry', which, however, was a most complex category represented partly by the concept of Bhadrolok.

External influence on agrarian society also finds expression in many other ways. The indigo rebellion of the mid-18th century and the agrarian disturbances of the seventies followed, in part at least, from the introduction of new legal concepts in society. Next to the agrarian society, the institution of caste at the rural level demonstrated a quite noticeable response to external stimuli. A significant feature of the rural history of the 19th century is a certain intensification of a perennial trend in Hindu society, namely the attempt on the part of some castes to rise above their traditional position in caste hierarchy. Though it was apparently a sign of mobility, it was, in a more fundamental sense, a confirmation of the strength of the caste system.

The movements first of all accepted the principle of caste divisions. It also accepted the basic fact that Brahmins held the highest position in the hierarchy. The object of an individual caste or sub-caste was to find for itself a position next to the Brahmins and to relegate the other castes or even allied sub-castes to a lower position. There is no evidence, however, that Hindu society recognised any real change in the traditional position of these castes or sub-castes. But the movement had a marked effect on certain social customs. Two of the most important standards of caste respectability, prohibition of widow remarriage and seclusion of women, were sought to be followed. The first criterion was particularly effective since there was a general tendency on the part of the aspiring castes to prohibit or restrict the practice.



As an observer of trends in the caste system in the late 19th century, Risely remarks in his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* :

"It is curious to observe that the operation of these tendencies have been quickened and the sphere of their action enlarged by the great extension of railways which has taken place in India during the last few years. Both Benares and Manchester have been brought nearer to their customers and have prospered by the increased demand for their characteristic wares. Siva and Krishna drive out the tribal gods as surely as grey shirtings displace the more durable hand-woven cloth. Pilgrimage has become more pleasant and more popular and the touts, who sally forth from great religious centres to promote these pious excursions, find their task easier and their clients more open to persuasion than was the case even twenty years ago. A trip to Jagannath or Gaya is no longer the formidable and costly undertaking that it was. The Hindu peasant who is to kiss the footprint of Vishnu, or to taste the hallowed rice that has been offered to the Lord of the World, may now reckon their journey by days instead of months. He need no longer sacrifice the savings of a life time to this pious object, and he has a reasonable prospect of returning home none the worse for a week's indulgence of religious enthusiasm. Even the distant Mocca, has been brought nearer by means of Messrs. Cook's steamers and return tickets within the reach of the faithful in India, and the influence of Muhammadan pilgrims has made itself felt in a quiet but steady revival of orthodox usage in Eastern Bengal."

The emergence of puritanical sects, notably the Ferazis among the Muhammadan community in the eastern districts, is a striking phenomenon of the rural history of 19th century Bengal. The extent of their influence on communal cleavage and also on peasant consciousness is yet to be systematically studied. This essay, however, has dealt only every partially with rural phenomenon except in their direct bearing on urban growth. Many other pressures on rural society did exist and, among them, the most prominent might have been the pressure on the artisan community. The interaction of tradition and change involves many other complex considerations and only some aspects of the problem, especially in their relation to the metropolitan society, have been treated here.

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## **SECTION 3**



## EDUCATION

The history of education in the nineteenth century is for the most part the story of English education in its origin and diffusion. People perceived in this new learning the fulfilment of a historic destiny. The blessings of European literature and science which were conveyed through its agency should not, however, be taken as the necessary sequel to British dominion in India. Much the same influences have been felt during this period in Japan, China and other regions of Asia where the British flag has never flown. Nevertheless, English education has undeniably proved a rich stimulus and a mighty solvent. Under the quickening impulse of its rationalism and humanism, the soul of Bengal was released. The rusty fetters of sophistry and superstition that had cumbered the land so long were snapped. The new learning brought in its train new heresies, but if there was much that was tare along with the wheat in this intellectual outgrowth, the harvest was verily a rich one. The seeds of English education in Bengal were sown never too late. The native springs of learning were being choked up in consequence of economic dislocation and prolonged administrative neglect. The schools of elementary learning settled down to a soulless routine and wasteful formalism. The spirit of enquiry had departed from the agencies of higher learning where imitative pedantry was mistaken for creative imagination and ingenious logic-chopping replaced positive sciences. Even in the favourite field of metaphysical speculation few great names appear to stir the slough of despond.

It was not from dearth of elementary schools that education languished. In 1803 Ward found that in Bengal, "almost all villages possessed schools for teaching reading, writing and elementary arithmetic".<sup>1</sup> In 1835 Adam made a modest reckoning of 1,00,000 schools in 1,50,748 villages comprised in the province. A singular feature of these village schools was the uniformity that characterised them throughout India, inspite of local diversities. Housed in shabby strawbuilt structure or held in open air under shady trees, and run by teachers who were "little respected and poorly rewarded", these schools nevertheless, responded to the eminent practical needs of a poverty-stricken people. These were essentially secular institutions and in Bengal the Kayasthas constituted the majority of the teachers. Children began at the age of five or six and received about five years of schooling. They tried their hands in forming letters of the alphabet on ground and then proceeded to writing on palm-leaf, plantain leaf, and finally on paper with ink made of lamp-black. Books were in rare use and their introduction by the School Book Society in 1819, was resented as a new-fangled contrivance to inculcate Christianity. In the Report of the same Society in 1824, we observe that the managers of the schools had to be solemnly reassured on this score before their squeamish



objections could be waived. Manuscript copies of learned works as the *Chanakya-Sloka*, the *Dalakarna*, the *Gangabandana*, etc., were occasionally employed probably as a melancholy reminder of a more enlightened age when these schools were interlinked with higher institutions through secondary agencies of learning. Such useful bridgeheads, if they had ever existed before, had fallen into irredeemable ruin, and Adam noted that "the prosperity or depression of learning in any locality does not imply the prosperous or depressed condition of vernacular instruction, and that the two systems of instruction are wholly unconnected with, and independent of, each other".<sup>2</sup> The faulty orthography of the few manuscripts in use confirmed the errors of the pupils. In the annual report of Seal's Free College in 1868-69, the Headmaster, who was one of the oldest citizens of Calcutta, wrote of these pupils, "In fact, every writer had his own way of spelling words, and his language was not only desultory but mixed up with Persian terms and technicalities handed down to us from time immemorial by the predecessors of our present rulers".<sup>3</sup> The schools excelled in the study of mental arithmetic through the masterly compendium of the rules of Subhankar and provided for commercial and agricultural accounts of an essentially utilitarian character. The democratic nature of these schools is exhibited by the presence of students of the lower castes e.g., Bagdis, Sunris and Chandals and also of Muhammadans, both as scholars and teachers in these schools, and it receives additional confirmation from the customary use of the highly economical and effective method of the monitor-pupil system which was to be later transplanted to England by Dr. Bell. Discipline was enforced in these institutions in a rough and ready manner by the lusty exercise of the cane as well as numerous forms of sadistic infliction which are recounted with lively details by Lal Behari Dey<sup>4</sup> and Rev. Long.<sup>5</sup> One grave limitation of these schools did not escape the notice of foreign observers. Buchanan believed that these schools tended "rather to narrow the mind to sordid gain and low cunning than to improve the heart and enlarge the understanding". Adam also was struck by "the narrow and contracted selfishness" of the native character which he ascribed to the absence of any training in these schools in wider civic consciousness or in the cultivation of the generous impulses of youth.<sup>6</sup>

The Muhammadan institutions known as the Makhtabs, laid natural emphasis on the teaching of the Koran but superciliously neglected arithmetic and vernacular as well as other means of practical instruction. The frequent use of manuscripts served 'to stimulate the intellect and form the taste', and the curriculum was 'more comprehensive and liberal than that of the Bengali schools'. Careful attention was devoted to epistolary composition which forms a distinctive and graceful feature of Persian literature. The teachers possessed much superior attainments and enjoyed higher salary averaging about Rs. 7/- a month, as against the Guru-Mahasayas who were maintained on a precarious pittance of Rs. 3/- to Rs. 5/- in cash and kind. The Arabic schools, which were fortunately



very few, were conducted by "Kath-Mullahs" whose pretentious ignorance qualified them for nothing better than the training of a similar race of the "lowest grade of Musalman priests". Wealthy Muhammadans occasionally supplemented the meagre school instruction with domestic tuition by Akhuns and a lower order of tutors called Ataliks (mentors). Domestic instruction was not confined to Muhammadans alone. It was sometimes the luxury of Zamindars, Talukdars and persons of "straitened resources but respectable character". In some of the poorest localities again, it was the desperate device of solicitous parents who clubbed together to maintain a teacher for their wards because no local schools existed.<sup>7</sup>

Higher education for the Hindus was imparted in the Tols. Besides offering gratuitous tuition, it was the customary duty of the teachers in Bengal, and of the Mithila Pandits who conformed to the Bengal tradition, to lodge and feed their students, though such generous practice did not prevail in the neighbouring provinces of Bihar and Orissa. Of the many princely assignments of rent-free lands which once enabled the learned Brahmins to maintain these institutions, a few survived in the beginning of the 19th century and were mostly the gifts of Rani Bhabani of Natore or Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadia. Gifts to professors and students were considered meritorious and where these sources fell short, it was deemed no disgrace for the students to go a-begging for their upkeep. The long vacation extended up to five months in the Nyaya Tols and two months in others. Besides, the frequent absence of the teachers was often imposed by the necessity of the impecunious Pandits going on a tour in quest of petty donations and Vidayas or honorific presents on ceremonial occasions. The Tols must have fallen into evil days for lack of official patronage but Adam computed their total at 1800 in Bengal, on an average of 100 such Tols in every district.<sup>8</sup> The plausibility of his conjecture is strengthened by the fact that 1801 Hamilton found 190 such Tols in 24-Parganas, and 150 schools of Hindu law alone with 5 to 20 scholars in each in the district of Hooghly. Buchanan found 119 Tols in Purnea, 34 professors in Rangpore, while in Dinajpur only 7 out of 22 thanas kept 16 schools of Sanskrit learning.<sup>9</sup> In 1818 Ward came across 28 Tols in Calcutta and 17 or 18 such schools at Juyunugur and Mujilee Puru (Jaynagar and Majilpur) and several schools at Andolee (Andul), Bhatpara, Vansvariya, Gundulpara and Bhudreshwuru (Bhardeswar), all in the vicinity of Calcutta. In the classic centre of learning at Nadia he enumerated 31 schools with 747 scholars. In 1829 Wilson ascertained on personal enquiry the existence of 25 such Tols with about 600 pupils in the same locality. Nadia attracted students from Assam, Nepal, Tirhoot and the extreme south, while Bengali students went out of their province to supplement their education. The Nadia schools stuck to their venerable tradition and specialised mostly in Nyaya and Smriti. The course of studies in other schools of Bengal included literature, grammar, law, logic, the systems of philosophy, the Puranas, the Tantras and medicine. The study of astrology was despised by intellectuals.



though it was profitable and widely popular. Curiously enough, Vedanta schools scarcely existed. Raja Nobokissen's attempt to transplant this branch of learning to Bengal by importing trained scholars from Benares, as noted by Buchanan, failed of its purpose. Vedic studies proved a delicate exotic in the Tantric mental climate of Bengal and Adam found no Vedanta schools worth mentioning. The study of Alamkara (poetics), Tantras and of astronomical works was estimated by Adam to have acquired wider popularity since the review by Ward in 1818. Adam came across 24 Tols in Murshidabad, 56 Tols in Birbhum and 190 Tols in Burdwan district with an average of 7 pupils for each school in 1838; while in Rangpur alone he had enumerated 38 Tols with 397 pupils in 1836. The onerous character of the Tol study is borne out by the fact that the students entered the schools between the age of 9 to 15 and stayed on till 30 to 35. This long duration was often necessitated by frequent interruption in study in consequence of the absence of teachers. Teaching was the prerogative of the Brahmins except in the sphere of medical education where Vaidya professors were allowed. The pupils also were mostly Brahmins with a sprinkling of Vaidyas, Kayasthas or Vaishnavas, etc., "who were permitted to study such portion of sciences as were composed by mere men". Scholarship was held in high estimation even though it was often in inverse ratio to its economic return. The character and the accomplishments of the teachers extorted the glowing admiration of foreigners. Buchanan reverently noted, "The Brahmins, generally speaking, have an intelligence and acuteness far beyond other Hindus. I am further inclined to think that they are subject to many fewer vices and that those persons will be found to approach nearest the good qualities, who are admitted even to the porch of science". Adam speaks with equal fervour of their discrimination, mildness and unaffected humility and adds refreshing testimony to their unexpected eagerness for European science and learning in so far as these do not run counter to their basic religious tenets.<sup>10</sup> 'The amount of authorship shown to exist in the different districts' in 1838 was rightly interpreted by Adam as a luminous index of the intellectual activity. The obituary notices in the *Samachar-Chandrika* on the death of the Pandits in different parts of the country are also indicative of the high respect they commanded in society, even when the state had turned its back on their labours.

The Madrassas, as agencies of Islamic education, were in general, less systematic and organised than the Tols. The parental relation that linked the Guru and his pupils in the Tols was not so strongly marked here, nor was the practice of students living on the bounty of the teachers so widely prevalent. Again, the Muslim endowments were invariably assigned to institutions. But the Hindu land-grants or donations were usually personal gifts to Pandits and their heirs, of course, on the tacit understanding that these should be utilised for public instruction—a sacred trust which was often scrupulously executed by the less enlightened descendants of the donees by procuring the service of some learned man



as a substitute.<sup>11</sup> In the early years of the nineteenth century the Madrassas were found by Buchanan to be as much frequented by the Hindus as by the Muhammadans. The use of Persian as the language of the courts and revenue transactions had stimulated its study among all. Persian was the language of the Akhbars or intelligencers of the native courts and of the printed newspapers of the educated classes in the days of Adam. The Hindus are said to have taken seriously to the study of Persian during the rule of Sikandar Lodi. A strong impetus was given to it later by the Emperor Akbar who had opened the Madrassa to Hindus. No wonder that the Hindus addressed themselves to the study of Persian with the same zeal as the Muhammadans and in the estimate of Adam, both acquired the same proficiency in the written language "that educated Englishmen have of their mother tongue". The Hindu students outnumbered the Muhammadans in the six districts surveyed in the Third Report of Adam in 1838 and counted 2087 over 1409 Muhammadans. There were 14 teachers of Persian who were Hindus, while the remaining 715 teachers of Persian and Arabic were all Muhammadans. Arabic was studied by 149 Muhammadans and only 9 Hindus of whom one was a Brahmin of Tirhoot.<sup>12</sup> The Maharaja of Burdwan financed two Persian schools and in Murshidabad five Hindu families maintained Persian teachers for the benefit of all. The Madrassa at Hooghly and the one in the same district at Sitapore found respectful mention in the First Report of Adam in 1835, but surprisingly enough there is no reference to any school of higher Islamic learning in Dacca. The systematic use of manuscripts in the Persian schools gave them an advantage over the Bengali schools as an "aid to stimulate the intellect and form the taste." The course of Persian instruction was given a higher rating by Adam 'for its more liberal character and comprehensive tendency than that pursued in the Bengali schools'. The paucity of information in Adam and in Buchanan about these institutions of Muslim learning and the meagre number specified may be suggestive of a greater measure of educational degradation among Muslims. In 1801 only one school of Muslim law was found in Murshidabad against 20 for instruction in Hindu law and customs.

In 1836 in the district of Rajshahi Adam came across only one Madrassa at Kusbeh Bagha 'with no organisation or discipline', while there existed 40 schools of Hindu learning. In the absence of state patronage, Tols and Madrassas depended alike on spasmodic private philanthropy. The course of Persian study began with the alphabet and comprised the formal reading of the Koran, 'the Pandnameh', the "Amandnameh," the "Gulistan", the "Bostan". "Joseph and Zuleikha, Jamil Kawanin", "Insha Yar Mahomed," "Secandernameh", "Danish", etc. "In the Arabic schools", observes Adam, "the course of study takes a much wider range". The Arabic syllabus comprised Munshaib, Tasrif, Sarf Mir, Miat Amil, etc., besides geometry of Euclid, Ptolemaic astronomy, natural philosophy and metaphysics. It is gratifying to learn that



some of the Persian teachers had literary compositions to their credit while four of the Arabic teachers in South Bihar and Tirhoot were authors of high repute for learning. But a few sparks of isolated brilliance could not redeem this formal and scholastic system from the listlessness that stifled it. The Annual Reports for 1844 and 1845 (pp. 87-88) sounded a note of despair on the effect which the Madrassas in general and the Hooghly Madrasa in particular had on the students. "Their intellect and feelings remain uncultivated and self-conceit strengthens their prejudices. To obtain the education they spend eight years, but few of them who attempt to obtain it succeed". The verdict recalls to our mind the caustic indictment of his old tutor, Mullah Shah by Aurangzeb for having imparted to him a laborious education which ended in the "dry, unprofitable and never-ending task of learning words" and its only effect was "to fatigue and ruin the intellect and to render a man headstrong and insufferable". Indeed, the system was felt to have long outlived its utility and vigorous re-organisation was sorely needed.

Besides these recognised organs of education one should not lose sight of the various impalpable but none the less living agencies, through which culture could be widely diffused among the illiterate masses. The Jatras (Mystery-play), the Kathakata (Recitation of epic themes), the Marionettes, the Kirtan, the contest of wit among the Kavials, all combined to enliven the mind of the people with a rich tincture of culture and redeem it from the sterilising influence of illiteracy. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "the education under discipline soaked into the heart of the people as education of delight and was integrated with the vital processes of society".<sup>13</sup> The silting up of these spontaneous channels of mass culture during the British rule was a ruinous loss which the poet bitterly deplored.

The beginning of English education in Bengal is to be sought in private enterprise and in the intuitive appreciation by the people of its material and moral benefits. Pioneer efforts were made by Eurasians as purely commercial ventures. "Sherbourne kept a school in Jorasanko quarter where Dwarkanath Tagore learned the English alphabet. Martin Bowl in Amratolla taught the founder of the wealthy Seal family. Aratoon Petroos was another who kept a school of 50 or 60 Bengali lads".<sup>14</sup> Puerile distiches linking up English words with their Bengali synonyms formed the essential scholastic pabulum; and "to write a good hand was far more important than to understand what was read, for to be a copyist or book-keeper was the destiny of the majority". In the opinion of Adam, till 1820, such schools even when they were run by "Europeans of reputed talents and acquirement" failed to secure a "humble livelihood". Probably the expensiveness of these schools restricted access to many poor aspirants. In his letter of February 2, 1824, to Rev. Henry Ware of Cambridge, U.S.A., Ram Mohan Roy felt himself "fully justified in stating that two-thirds of the native population of Bengal would be exceedingly glad to see their children educated in English learning".<sup>15</sup> So



strong an impetus was imparted to English education in the ensuing decade that in 1835 Adam remarked that a school in which English language was not taught was sure to dwindle away.<sup>16</sup> Gleanings from contemporary native journals fortify Adam's views on the pace of progress. The *Sambada-Prabhakar* of 26 January, 1828, assessed the total number of students reading English in Calcutta, at 1000. In a memorandum submitted to the General Committee of Public Instruction in 1833, David Hare estimated the total number of students receiving education in English in all stages at three thousand. His figure was no broad guess-work but was computed from the reports of inspectors of the Calcutta School Society. On July 12, 1834, the '*Enquirer*' reckoned the exact roll-strength of certain specified institutions at 1868. This list, however, does not include institutions of whose existence we are aware from contemporary newspapers, as for example, the free school for Hindus at Bhowanipur founded by Jagamohan Basu in about 1800 A.D., besides several morning schools run mostly by zealous ex-students of the Hindu College in the third decade of the century.<sup>17</sup> The mixture of motives which whetted the new appetite for English was graphically summed up in a resolution of the villagers of Andool for the opening of an English school in their locality on July 28, 1838. In their opinion, English language "is at present the official language, it is lucrative, highly beneficial, a source of respectable living for the indigent gentry and of praise and prestige for the rich, an instrument of securing their property, a means for stimulating compassion, culture, knowledge and courage among the common people, etc."<sup>18</sup> The different agencies which were at work to swell the feeble current of the first two decades of the century into a mighty spate in the thirties should now be reviewed.

The East India Company confined itself in the main to an exclusively Oriental education. In response to a petition from the Muslim gentry Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrassa in 1781 by payment of £6,000/- out of his own pocket, for which he was subsequently reimbursed by the Company. The communal balance was redressed by the opening of the Sanskrit College at Benares in 1792 by Jonathan Duncan. In order to placate orthodox sensibilities the internal discipline and the list of holidays of these institutions were placed in strict conformity to scriptural dispensations. The spirit of research was kindled by the foundation of the Asiatic Society in January, 1784, as a semi-official centre of Europeans only. Indians were not admitted to its jealously guarded confines till 1829. Minto's lament in his historic Minute of March 6, 1811, over "the progressive state of decay of science and culture among the natives of India" roused the conscience of the British Parliament which had been impervious to the passionate appeals of Charles Grant between 1792 and 1797, and to the evangelical fervour of William Wilberforce. These two had vainly pleaded for sending school-masters and missionaries to India, 'tending to the advancement of useful knowledge and to religious and moral improvement'. The Charter Act of 1813 provided a sum of not less



than one lakh of rupees in each year "for the revival and improvement of literature and for the introduction and promotion of the knowledge of sciences". It is memorable only as a moral gesture signifying the assumption of responsibility of education by the Government. But the disbursement of the sum was optional and it remained a mere paper clause till 1823. Meanwhile indigenous as well as missionary efforts were vigorously at work. The Hindu College, 'Vidyalaya' founded in Calcutta in 1817 with only 20 pupils, was the brain-child of David Hare and Ram Mohan Roy. In its plan to impart secular education to respectable Hindus in the English and Indian languages and in the literature and science of Europe and Asia, it symbolised the noblest aspiration of a generation which valued the new education not only as a sordid bread-winning device but as an elevating intellectual and moral discipline. Incidental reference is found to the establishment of a college in Burdwan in 1817 by Maharaja Tejeschandra in the testimony borne by one who professed to have been its Principal, Charles Du Bordieux, in the historic law suit of Protapchand, on May 31, 1836.<sup>19</sup> The Serampore College was founded in 1818 by the famous Serampore trio, Carey, Marshman and Ward, with the avowed object of conversion by training up a devoted band of Native Evangelists, but it extended to other youths the benefit of its instruction in 'Eastern Literature and European Science', without any offence to their conscientious feelings. Making due allowance for English as a subject for special and advanced study the noble founders of the College had the prescience to realise that "the hope of imparting a sound education to the people of the country, through the medium of a language not their own, was altogether fallacious". (*The Story of Serampore and its College*, pp. 24-25). The Bishop's College (1819) admitted a few non-Christians though it was intended for the training of the Indian clergy. In the sphere of elementary education a beginning had been made in 1817 by the School Book Society which distributed text books in English and vernacular and enjoyed a government grant for sixty years. The sale-record of their books is a clear index of the mounting popularity of English. Their report of 1830 shows the sale of 9,616 English books against 10,074 Bengali books.<sup>20</sup> But in 1835 they sold two books in English for one book in Bengali. The Calcutta School Society which occupied itself primarily with schools for the masses and with the preparation of necessary teachers, ran an English school at Pataldanga as supplementary to its Vernacular school in the neighbourhood and preparatory to the Hindu College. Classes were so arranged as to enable the boys attending Vernacular schools in the morning and afternoon to join the English school from 10-30 a.m. to 2-30 p.m. Admission to the English classes was a privilege wistfully sought by boys who literally besieged the gate of the school. This English school was the sole survivor in the general wreckage of all the institutions of the Society consequent on its financial disaster in 1833. It still continues in a prosperous condition and perpetuates the name of the man who shunned the Church to tread the path



of Christ and whose life of sacrifice and generous exertions for endearing education to the Bengali boys won for him 'the singularly inappropriate sobriquet of Padre Hare'. The General Committee of Public Instruction was set up in 1823, the year when the first grant was made, and it marks a "turning point in the history of Indian education". Acting on the suggestion of H. H. Wilson the Committee abandoned the project of a Sanskrit College at Nadia and organised the Calcutta Sanskrit College in the hope that 'the educated classes among the Hindus should, through the medium of their sacred language, be imbued with a taste for European literature and science'. Ram Mohan's memorable protest was overruled in a cavalier manner by the General Committee on the 2nd January, 1824, on the specious plea the "it bears the signature of one individual alone, whose opinions are well-known to be hostile to those entertained by almost all his countrymen". The generous aid by the Committee saved from impending extinction the Hindu College whose roll strength had declined by 1824 to 107, of whom 25 only were pay scholars and the monthly income had fallen to a paltry sum of Rs. 100/-.<sup>21</sup> English classes were engrafted on Oriental Colleges like the Calcutta Madrasa and the Sanskrit College at Calcutta and Benares and the Agra College (1832). District English schools were established at Delhi and Benares. The printing of Sanskrit and Arabic books and the translation of European scientific works into Arabic were undertaken at an inordinate expense. The Committee interested itself with the education of the people and sought relevant information from its local agents in September, 1823, but no reply to the query is recorded.<sup>22</sup> English schools cropped up under the fostering care of the Calcutta Diocesan Committee, the Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, etc., but their achievements were eclipsed by the General Assembly's Institution of the Church of Scotland. It was founded by Alexander Duff in 1830 in a crusading zeal "to kill Hinduism by striking it at its brain, Calcutta". Rammohan rendered willing assistance to Duff in his educational efforts. The Hindu College had given the lead to the formation of native schools, both as 'pay schools' and on a gratuitous basis. The noble Rammohan averted sectarian bickering by his self-effacement in the management of the Hindu College and opened an English school at Simulia. The Union School and the Oriental Seminary of Gour Mohun Auddy were notable triumphs in this direction. Even the backwaters of the mofussil were stirred to new vigour by the signal success of the schools at Taki and Birbhum under the patronage of enlightened landlords. Among free schools honourable mention must be made of the one founded by Jagamohan Bose which was in its thirtieth year of existence in 1829 when its pupils numbered 900, and some of them had made enough progress to be able to "grapple with difficult and abstruse books in English". Several schools were run by ex-students of the Hindu College. The Hooghly College, founded in 1836, stimulated its students to start two schools in the same locality on the completion of their education. As a token of the blatant secularism<sup>23</sup> that animated these institu-



tions we find the founders of the Hindu Free School on September 10, 1831, vaunting of their unconcealed abhorrence of Hinduism and their scepticism to all religions whatsoever—a strange gospel which the neophytes of Young Bengal had presumably imbibed from their inspiring angel, Henry Vivian Derozio. Yet it was no mean encomium for Derozio that his pupils who derided customary norms were deemed incapable of any sham or falsehood. To him the members of the Academic Association owed their unwanted ardour for truth, social reform and intellectual integrity.

The Court of Directors watched developments. In their letter of February 18, 1824, they insisted on utility as the primary test, though they were prepared to make allowance for Hindu and Muhammadan media, or to consult special prejudices so far as these were compatible with useful learning. In their letter of September 5, 1827, they felt that “a little skill and address is in most cases all that is necessary to remove the prejudices of the natives, which fortunately on the subject of education does not appear to be too strong”. On September 28, 1830, they had “the gratifying assurance that the higher classes of our Hindu and Muhammadan subjects are ripe for still further extension among them of European education and European science and literature. In the Minutes of Evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on the Affairs of the E.I.Co., in 1832, Holt Mackenzie, James Sullivan, Lushington and others testified that the natives in Bengal were generally anxious and willing to learn English. English had already replaced Persian as the language of diplomatic correspondence and some of the Vernacular papers were urging its substitution for Persian as the language of judicial business. The rising tide of popular enthusiasm had its effect on the General Committee where the five younger members were ardent Anglicists, and in 1835 they had been locked in a tie with the Classicists for about three years. The prodigious literary prestige of T.B. Macaulay who was the President of the Committee tipped the balance. His renowned Minute was submitted to the Governor-General in Council in February 2, 1835. Its fanfare of rhetoric and cascades of satire swept away the lingering vestige of misgiving from the mind of Bentinck and the award of 7th March was proclaimed. Without waiting for the report of Adam who had been engaged by the Government for conducting an exhaustive enquiry about popular education, it pledged the British Government to the promotion of ‘European literature and science among the natives of India’, and declared that “all the funds appropriated for the purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone”. Expenditure on Oriental publications was to cease. No fresh stipend was to be hereafter awarded to students in institutions of Oriental learning which were, however, to continue.

The incisiveness of Macaulay's invectives upon Oriental learning is blunted by his stupendous ignorance of the same. His peremptory dismissal of the claims of the Vernacular can be condoned because none of



the parties who entered the fray did hold its brief and so its case obviously went by default. Moreover, Macaulay was not utterly insensible to the supreme need of the Vernacular. The report for 1836 of the General Committee of which he was the President observes, "We concede the formation of a Vernacular literature to be the object to which all our efforts must be directed".<sup>24</sup> If the case of the Vernacular as the medium of education came to be disposed of in later years only by passing compliments about its importance by successive administrators and by a supercilious native intelligentsia, the cause must be probed deeper in social factors that favoured this attitude than in the myth of the inexorable fiat of an individual holding a nation spell-bound for more than a century. But the most invincible weapon in Macaulay's armoury for the defence of English was flaunted in the following terms: "In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seat of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East". As the Messiah of the new light from the West, Macaulay had the temperamental imbalance of an apostle whose zeal often outran his discretion. He was besides, a typical Whig of his age with his pathetic faith in the emergence of a public-spirited middle class as the custodian of the new learning and its subsequent purveyor to the masses in their own language. He hailed with prophetic augury the day when European knowledge must spur the people to demand European institutions. His capacious mind could foresee with equanimity the "imperishable Empire of our arts, our morals, our literature and laws" even when British dominion in India will have gone into the limbo of the past.<sup>25</sup>

The Resolution of March 7, 1835, cut the Gordian knot. It not only determined the policy of the Government but accelerated native effort which expressed itself in a prolific growth of private institutions for teaching English in Calcutta and the mofussil. The Vernacular papers from 1835 to 1840 bristle with these records. Even the inhabitants of the French settlement at Chandernagore felt the need of English education for which they were ready with contributions to supplement the grant of the Pondicherry authority.<sup>26</sup> Macaulay threw himself into the task of organising the new institutions with a crusading zeal to which, "in all probability, English education owes more than to his Minute".<sup>27</sup> Besides the Medical College, six new schools were founded. The Government started with 14 institutions in 1835 and had under its control in 1837, 48 institutions with 5,196 pupils of whom 3,729 were in Anglo-Vernacular schools and colleges. The Hooghly College which was started in 1836 was, to become "the nursery of Bengali literature". It was financed by appropriation from the Hajee Mohsin Trust Fund. There was a hectic flush of about 1500 admissions in the course of the year in the English section in which the Muhammadans constituted an inconspicuous minority. Even after the primary excitement had subsided, the English pupils numbered 150 towards the close of 1837.<sup>28</sup> The disgruntled Orientalists still stuck to a



forlorn cause and continued their efforts to procure a repeal of the Resolution of 1835. The controversy was finally set at rest by Lord Auckland's Minute of November 24, 1839, which was conceived in the spirit of a judicious compromise. At an additional cost of Rs. 31,000/- only to the Government Auckland could guarantee the maintenance of the existing Oriental institutions without relaxing the effort for English education. "Vernacular instruction was to be combined with English, full choice being allowed to pupils to attend whichever institutions they might individually prefer".<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile Adam had submitted his report at three stages on July 1, 1835, December, 23, 1835 and on April 28, 1838. The last Report embodied a concrete scheme of Vernacular education and trenchantly exposed the absurdity of any scheme of national education through the medium of English. Brian Hodgson, an erudite authority on Tibet, poured unmixed scorn at the fantastic unreality of the project of "the training of a promiscuous crowd of English smatterers". But the paucity of suitable text-books and efficient teachers and the failure of the plan of Vernacular education at Chinsurah, Dacca, Bhagalpore, Saugor and in the Ajmere district weighed heavily with Auckland.<sup>30</sup> His personal preference for English at the expense of the Vernacular was evident in his opposition to the contrary counsel of James Mill but he allowed his convictions to be moderated by the logic of circumstances. (Ballhatchett's articles on the subject in the *Cambridge Historical Journal* 1951 and 1954). Scarcity of funds was the rock on which all schemes of popular education were wrecked—"There are more villages at the Presidency than we have rupees annually at our disposal". Auckland advised patience in awaiting the results of rival experiments of English and Vernacular education then under way in Bengal and Bombay respectively. Higher education in English was to be intensified by a project of 9 Central Colleges supported by feeder schools at every district. The 'stipend' system which encouraged apathetic laggards was to be replaced by a scheme of Senior and Junior scholarships for English and Oriental education. English Senior scholarships were of more than double the value of the Oriental, as more remunerative jobs were always available to entice such students away. The Annual Report for 1839-40 provides an abstract of the categories of employment with corresponding salaries for students of Government schools and colleges. There were 328 teachers and 128 vakils in the grade of Rs. 15 to Rs. 60, 170 writers getting Rs. 10 to Rs. 100, while 23 Deputy Collectors and 7 Sudder Ameeris got Rs. 300 a month and 2 Abkari Superintendents earned the highest salary of Rs. 500 a month. Government purse-string was being slowly relaxed and the educational fund was increased from Rs. 4,00,000 in 1836 to Rs. 5,50,000 in 1840. In 1842 the General Committee was replaced by a more powerful body, the Council of Education which clung tenaciously to the filtration theory with its emphasis on higher education, which had been initiated by its predecessors. The Council directed its efforts to the improvement of the quality of text-books and teachers and organised regular system of examinations



which eventually became passports to public employment with Hardinge's Resolution of October 10, 1844. Even for the lowest offices it was declared that "persons who can read and write are to be preferred to those who can not". The system of examination provoked complaints from missionary institutions on grounds of discrimination in favour of the syllabus pursued in Government Colleges which, by the way, was denounced as a godless scheme of education based on the exclusion of the Bible. The Council in 1845 recommended the scheme of a University as an impartial examining body to set the standard of excellence. But it suffered the fate of an idea born before its time. Certain contemporary reflections on the norms of education may not be out of place here. The standard of fitness attained in the Senior Scholarship examination was considered "fully equal in extent to the Bachelor's examination of Oxford, Cambridge and Dublin", and "the creditable skill and proficiency" of the Medical Graduates were 'on a par with those required from graduates of most British Universities'.<sup>31</sup> The syllabus in some schools was exceedingly various, comprising, *inter alia*, astronomy, pneumatics, optics, natural philosophy, use of globes, poetry, Hindustani, etc. Sensible people had a cynical suspicion that the real progress made in schools was often "in inverse ratio to the number of books studied". The list of examiners included venerable names like those of Macaulay, Trevelyan, Cameron, Prinsep, Dr. Grant and Principal Mill. Unfair practices of stowing in papers under ample robes in loose slippers by candidates to the examination-hall were not unknown, though these very rarely occurred. The tendency to cramming which has been a chronic pest of the Indian educational system was already disconcertingly apparent. People who scoffed at this evil seldom stooped to consider that the inordinate strain of learning an utterly foreign language under sheer necessity, frequently with insufficient tutorial aids, compelled cramming. It was, besides, an odious symptom of the anxiety neuroses to which the students were prone lest the avenues of higher education and better careers should be closed to them for lack of proper linguistic equipment. Their situation was not dissimilar to that of English boys, as depicted in Tom Brown's School-days (1841) conning the rules of Latin grammar which they detested before the reforms of Arnold at Rugby. Yet on an overall estimate it was observed that "the students of our Colleges receive a really good education, the best or about the best that is given anywhere in Asia".<sup>32</sup>

Vernacular education kept up a sturdy and unequal struggle. An attempt to improve upon the indigenous schools by a new scheme of Vernacular education began with the missionaries. William Carey was the precursor of this new experiment and his school at Mudnabatty (Maldah) had 40 boys when he left the place for Serampore in 1799. Ellerton's school in Maldah in the beginning of the century was followed up by Robert May's scheme of a network of schools which covered the field from Kalna to Chandernagore with its centre at Chinsurah. On his death in 1818, May left 36 schools with 3,600 pupils. Some of the



schools continued till 1836, when with the opening of the Hooghly College they were believed to have outlived their period of utility and were closed down. But these Vernacular schools had served their historic mission. In the opinion of the *Friend of India* 25th July, 1839, these had "cleared away all prejudices and imparted both the desire and the capacity for receiving any education the Committee might think of bestowing". James Stewart opened 10 schools in Burdwan in 1818. The Serampore missionaries maintained 21 schools which, being free, pushed out of existence the poor village schools. The Calcutta School Society which began its labour in 1818 had on its rolls in 1828, 6,126 students in 148 schools. In 1839, the Hindu College attempted a bold scheme of advanced national education comprehending the study of political economy, moral philosophy and geometry entirely in Bengali. In 1854 Rev. Long was agreeably surprised to find 200 students in this affiliated Pathshala "who pay 8 annas each—and that for Vernacular education".<sup>33</sup> Effect was given to Act. XXIX of 1837 in the following year when the Vernacular was made the language of the judicial proceedings. In 1844 Hardinge found the moment opportune for opening 101 vernacular schools which were eventually smothered by administrative indiscretion of the Board of Revenue under which they were placed. The Inspector, "who knew nothing of Bengali reported on these schools and was even requested to draw up a scheme of school-books for them", while overworked Collectors were instructed to supervise a system which, it was complained, "held no prospects of temporal advancement". No wonder that the students thrust their books into the masters' hands and insisted on English education which had acquired a new value in terms of livelihood. The schools languished and were transferred to the control of the Council of Education in 1852. Halliday, the Lt. Governor of Bengal in his Minute of March 24, 1854, formulated a plan of Model Vernacular schools based on a close adherence to the existing institutions of the country and entrusted its execution to the indefatigable Vidyasagar who was then the Principal of the Sanskrit College. Vidyasagar began the experiment with 5 schools in each of the four districts under his charge in 1856 and provided for a normal school for the training of teachers who were to practise their art in the Hindu College Pathshala.<sup>34</sup>

The Education Despatch of 1854 going under the name of Sir Charles Wood (though Alexander Duff and C. H. Cameron also had a big hand in it) was a triumph of constructive legislation. It formulated "a properly articulated system of education from the primary school to the University". Education was ostentatiously recognised as one of the sacred duties of the Government. The neglect of Vernacular was deplored. The Filtration theory was repudiated, at least, in its extreme form. It was toned down to one of concession and liberal compromise. The higher classes were called upon to bear a considerable part of the cost of their education, so that the funds thus released could be devoted to the hitherto neglected task of spreading "useful practical knowledge suited to every station of life, to the great mass of the people who are utterly incapable of obtaining any



education worth the name by their own unaided efforts". The broad principle of "English for the select few and Vernacular for the masses" was adopted. But the most distinctive innovations proposed were the plans of the University and of grant-in-aid. In both these spheres, the prevailing English concepts of education served as the inspiration as well as the incubus. Universities were advocated and set up in the three Presidencies on the model of London as examining and affiliating bodies though the system was already outmoded in London and was to undergo a drastic modification four years later. The University scheme had the supreme advantage of costing little to the Government. The grant-in-aid scheme was inspired by the utilitarian principles which Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth had inculcated upon the English Committee on Education in 1846. Devised originally for training colleges and for incidental capital aid to schools it was extended subsequently to the maintenance of schools in England and of Queen's Colleges presided over by the Queen's University in Ireland during 1845-53. The faith in secular education was fortified by the resolution of the Manchester Conference 1851 attended by Cobden and many others. The grant-in-aid principle was calculated to lighten the financial burden of the state and yet make education cheap and efficient as a result of free competition and private enterprise, "Missions now had the additional claim of a legal right to these grants", irrespective of any religious instruction they chose to impart.<sup>35</sup> This was followed by a phenomenal growth of secondary schools. The Council of Education had begun with 7 Colleges and 16 English schools maintained by the Government. When the Directorate of Public Instruction was set up in 1855 the schools had multiplied to 47 ; but within a year and a half 79 English schools received grant besides 140 Vernacular schools, mostly in metropolitan districts.<sup>36</sup> But though the grant-in-aid succeeded to a great extent in democratising the base of education in England, it failed of its immediate purpose in India. The miserable poverty of the Indian masses prevented them from availing of its benefit, while the middle classes who profited most by its provisions swelled the ranks of the Anglicists and widened the cleavage between the educated few and the residual multitude. Scarcely had the newly constituted University of Calcutta and the aided schools been in operation than the Mutiny intervened. The Bengali intelligentsia harboured no illusions about the disruptive forces likely to be let loose by this movement. But the *'Hindoo Patriot'* of Harish Mukhherjee displayed superb courage in denouncing the vitriolic Anglo-Indian press and in firmly urging moderation and sanity to a Government that was bent on hounding the rebels with a pathological fury. Pessimists like Ellenborough, the President of the Board of Control, in the letter to the Court of Directors on April 28, 1858, cried alarm and regretted that "the promised good had not been derived from the system of 1854". The assumption of the responsibility of administration by the Crown after the Mutiny rendered a fresh stock-taking necessary. The outcome was the Despatch of 1859. This Despatch marked a new departure by the frank recogni-



tion of the ineffectiveness of the grant-in-aid for the rapid expansion of vernacular education and of the paramount necessity of providing the means of elementary education by the direct instrumentality of the officers of Government. Provinces were authorised to devise schemes adapted to their peculiar needs and to levy a compulsory rate for the object. Thomason in the North-Western Provinces had already worked wonders in vernacular education with the levy of 1% cess on land revenue. It should be borne in mind that the economic structure of the province favoured his scheme. There, the Government, as the landlord was brought into contact with the people through an elaborate hierarchy of officials who carried on their proceedings necessarily in the vernacular. In the absence of any professional class, the rudiments taught in the Tehsildaree schools sufficed for the practical needs of the teeming peasantry.<sup>37</sup> But the situation in Bengal was radically different. Here, the Permanent Settlement had called into existence a large and intermediary middle class with heritable tenure on fragmentary holdings. This class had a veritable craze for English education as the open sesame to Government or professional employment and they looked upon the Government's scheme of primary schools based on donation as well as payment to tuition fees as a devious cul-de-sac. The passing of the Rent Act in 1859 provided the tenants with a new incentive to literacy in order to better guard their rights, but the peasantry were insensitive to the utility of the Government schools and consequently, for the maintenance or improvement of these they were unable to "make sacrifices which the same classes in England often refused to make". In fact, the Permanent Settlement impeded the levy of any new cess on land in Bengal for the furtherance of education. The justice and expediency of the cess was impugned on the ground that about a third of the children who attended the primary schools at that time belonged to non-agricultural classes. Hence, it was contended that a general educational rate would be more equitable than a cess on land only. This barren controversy staved off innovation, but "large government grants. . . . coupled with the adoption of the agency of indigenous schools helped considerable expansion in the province".

In 1855 the Department received charge of 9,884 pupils in primary institutions. It was estimated that the neglected indigenous schools still served willy-nilly, the need of 5,00,000 pupils. Hence in Bengal the new edifice of primary education was reared up on the ground-work of the indigenous schools, though the Government fumbled its way through various expedients. The Circle System was tried in 1855 but only 172 schools with 7,731 pupils were covered under it in 1860-61. Again, experience revealed that the system possessed no capability of success among the masses who would be content to stick to their customary vocations without regarding elementary education as the stepping stone to a new career. A modification of the scheme was proposed by A. M. Monteath,<sup>38</sup> Secretary to the Government of India, and its operation was confined by Sir John Peter Grant to the care of Bhudeb Mukherjee.



This scheme envisaged the foundation of Normal Schools for the training of Guru Mahasayas for one year on a stipend of Rs. 5/- a month with a written engagement from the village that on the completion of his training the Guru would be appointed by the local unit with a salary of not less than Rs. 5/- a month. The decentralisation scheme of Lord Mayo enabled Sir George Campbell to provide a liberal grant of Rs. 4 lakhs in 1872, by which date 2000 village schools had been taken in hand. But the success of the scheme was grievously impaired by the parsimony of the villagers who used to reduce their contributions in proportion to the stipend paid by the Government. Later developments bore out the unpalatable lesson that "the system helped the improvement of schools already in existence, but failed to establish them where *prima facie*, the need is most urgent."<sup>39</sup> It also failed in its major objective of reaching the masses. For vernacular schools of the improved class there was little or no demand. "No one wants them, no one will subscribe to them, no one will go to them when they are set on foot". This was the report of the Inspector. On the other hand higher instruction in Normal Schools inevitably filled the Gurus with expectation of higher pay. H. L. Harrison's experiment of the Midnapore system of payment by results superseded the stipend system in 1875. Cheapness was its best recommendation so that in 1881-82, inspite of the enhancement of the primary grant to Rs. 5 lakhs the average annual grant to each school was little more than Rs 11/- against Campbell's lowest estimate of Rs. 24/- a year. In 1870 there were only 68,500 pupils in primary schools recognised by Government. The corresponding figure for 1881-92 in 28 Government and 47,374 aided institutions was 8,36,351 pupils besides 49,238 in 3265 unaided schools awaiting incorporation. Yet this enormous expansion cost the public funds less than in any province in India. The Provincial Fund bore Rs. 5,97,000 out of the total expenditure of Rs. 21,32,000 for primary education which benefited 20·82 of the school-going population among males and 0·80 among females.<sup>40</sup> The Hunter Commission utilised Ripon's machinery of Local Self-Government by setting up Municipal and Local Board School Funds respectively with exclusive regard to primary education. To disarm a living apprehension on this score, the levy of the local fund was emphatically declared as strengthening rather than diminishing the claim on Provincial Funds. The reforms prevented the parasitic expansion of education in urban areas on the revenue raised from rural zones. But the results fell far short of expectation. Primary education which had made rapid headway between 1871-1882 made slow progress afterwards. In 1900-01 the number of unaided schools increased four-fold and stood at 12,141 (U.P. 186 & L.P. 11,955) against 34,079 (U.P. 4,039 & L.P. 30,040) aided schools, while the number of students receiving education registered a very moderate increase and stood at 11,96,003 only<sup>41</sup>. The Government Resolution of March 11, 1904, records with a note of deep despair that "4 villages out of 5 are without school ; 3 boys out 4 grow up without education and only 1 girl in 40 attends any kind of school". It was further recognised



that primary education "possesses strong claim upon the sympathy both of the Supreme and of the local Governments and should be made a leading charge upon provincial revenues". The results system, "universally acknowledged to have been a failure", in the Quinquennial Review on Education (1902-07), was abandoned in favour of a complicated but more rational system of aid. Happier results attended this enlightened policy of India Government. The Report of 1911-12 registered a conspicuous achievement by indicating a decennial increase in the number of students which was double the increase of twenty years since 1881-82. Yet one must admit with a sigh that this tardy progress touched only a fringe of the colossal problem of mass illiteracy.

Secondary education evoked widespread interest because it answered the immediate need of the gentry for a career. It was not organised as the apex of a pyramid of which the primary and the middle schools were to constitute the base and the accessory stages. The various institutions were designed for the needs of different social levels and they ran on parallel lines. Thus, 39% of the pupils in High Schools and 78% in M.E. and 83% in M.V. Schools belonged to the primary stage.<sup>42</sup> Long before 1854, private enterprise had been more persistently active in Bengal in this sphere of education than in any other province of India, and in less than a year of its announcement, the whole of the grant-in-aid was eagerly seized upon and utilised. Secondary schools multiplied rapidly so that by 1863 they outstripped the Departmental ones in the ratio of 423:221 and they received an appropriation of 33% of what was spent by the Government for its own institutions. In 1870 the Government was smugly complacent at having fairly met the needs of the people in this direction by means of 270 Department schools and 1400 aided schools, not to mention 113 schools that received no aid. By raising the grants from Rs. 1,60,000/- in 1862-63 to Rs. 5,47,500/- in 1870-71, the Government stimulated private outlay to four times its own contribution.<sup>43</sup> The shifting of the focus of Government interest to indigenous schools in 1870 was viewed by the people with a grave concern "which in some districts assumed such exaggerated proportions that it can only be fitly described as a state of actual panic".<sup>44</sup> Public opinion construed it as a mere pretence for the ulterior design of arresting the growth of higher education by diverting funds from it, because higher education had already had the disturbing effect of kindling the national sentiment of the people. The *Nildarpana* of Dinabandhu Mitra presented a lurid picture of unspeakable indignities and oppression which goaded the indigo cultivators of Bengal to organised protests for which educated Bengalis manifested active sympathy. A Society for the Promotion of National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal was founded by Rajnarain Basu in 1861 and the Hindu Mela of 1867 crystallised feelings which had been in a fluid state so long. But in spite of the shrinkage of Government aid and the closure of some Government institutions, the demands of the people for higher education could not be curbed. "The educational movement



had obtained so great momentum of its own that, it was already in Bengal, if not in other provinces, beyond the control of the Department of Public Instruction".<sup>45</sup> The number of pupils who sought secondary education increased from 91,145 in 1870-71 to 1,39,198 in 1881-82, inspite of the separation of Assam in 1874. Private benefaction, commemorated in the names of countless schools, outdistanced not only Government but missionary endeavour. The Indian Education Commission was set up in 1882 in deference to the complaints of the missionaries that the Despatch of 1854 recommending the closure of Government institutions was not being properly implemented and that missionary efforts were being threatened with extinction by the scheme of ostentatiously secular education which the state fostered. The trumpety charges was conclusively refuted by the Commission which admitted that "in Calcutta where missionary effort is stronger than in any other city of India, the number of unaided high schools under native management is even greater", and that better results at cheaper cost by the former vindicated their superiority. Hence the Commission blighted the cherished hopes of the missionaries by recording its unanimous opposition to withdrawal in their favour. It must be recognised that the Commission accumulated an amazing mass of materials relating to different spheres of Indian education except university and technical education which were excluded from its purview. But it failed to strike out a new path. It simply "brought into prominence and gave greater freedom of action to forces which were already at work". It toed the line of British educational policy in vogue by reaffirming the need of state patronage of primary education in India. But the circumstances in the two countries were so widely different that a healing reform for one induced a stunted and languid growth in another. The new enthusiasts for mass education in India ignored certain rude realities and probably made the mistake of putting the cart before the horse. It should be borne in mind that it was only with the advent of the Reforms that the new democracy in mid-Victorian England first realised the necessity of teaching its masters to read the alphabet, while the extensive use of mechanical appliances added an economic incentive to mass education. In Bengal the economic motive was conspicuously absent nor was social conscience alive to the edifying effect of popular instruction. The Hunter Commission further recommended a bifurcation of studies by providing for a new course of non-literary and commercial character with the added bait of admission to public services. But the expensiveness of the new course precluded its adoption by private institutions while the want of adequate opening for such students in an industrially under-developed country condemned from the outset the technical courses to a futility from which no lip homage about dignity of labour could redeem it. The Commission lost the precious opportunity of making the Vernacular the medium of secondary education even after the enrichment of the Bengali language by the labours of Akshoy Kumar Dutt, Bhudeb Mukherjee, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, to name only few, had removed



all scruples on the ground of its inadequacy. The admission test of the best school in Bengal, the Hindu School, had already indicated that a steady majority of successful competitors came from the Vernacular and not from English middle school.<sup>46</sup> The English medium to which the pupils were irrevocably committed turned out to be a Dead Sea apple and the Indian Universities Commission 1902 made the discouraging admission that students "after Matriculation fail to understand lectures in English when they join the College". This perpetuated the vice of cramming, while for lack of any effective demand the preparation of Vernacular textbooks could not be earnestly undertaken. It did not escape the observation of the Commission, as of all discerning critics, that premature immersion in an alien language that was ill-taught by ill-paid and ill-qualified teachers in the lower classes not only cramped the linguistic foundation but clogged the path to all knowledge because of the pupil's imperfect command of the language. The Government Resolution of 1904 gave a salutary warning by forbidding the use of English as the medium of instruction before the age of 13. The Indian Universities Act (1904) replaced "laissez-faire" by state control over private management in order to ensure quality instead of quantity. Recognition by the Department was to be made a condition of existence rather than a qualifying clause for state aid, while recognition by the University was equally essential for admission to the Matriculation examination. Measures were adopted to plug the loop-holes by which such regulations had been foiled in the past, by preventing transfer of pupils from unrecognised schools and by guarding the access to Matriculation examination for only bona-fide private candidates. But in Bengal the unaided schools, after the departure of Lord Curzon, succeeded in shutting their doors to Government inspection. In any case, the dual control subjected both the Department and the University to a new strain which sorely tested educational statesmanship in ensuing years without impeding quantitative expansion on which the Department had frowned since 1870. Thus, while the number of Departmental schools remained virtually static, the total number of other schools, showed a steady rise from 132 in 1870 to 218 in 1880-81, to 353 in 1891-92, and 535 in 1901-02. This astounding expansion of secondary education is a significant index of the broadening base of the new middle class which administrative consolidation along with the slow industrialisation of the country was inevitably throwing forward. But the efficiency of the institutions did not, in any manner or measure, keep pace with their number. In 1902 more than one-third of these were unaided venture schools which converted education to a profitable business speculation with low fees and a niggardly pittance to teachers, (euphemistically termed salaries), ranging from Rs. 5/- to Rs. 78/- per month.<sup>47</sup> "Education in these schools was cheap because it was bad and bad because it was cheap". Again, the institutions aspired to rise higher in the academic hierarchy by the premature transformation of a middle school to the Entrance standard and of the high school to an



Intermediate college under an inveterate misconception that a ramshackle college was intrinsically superior to a well-managed high school. In spite of the luxuriant outgrowth of high schools, there was none to resemble the public schools of England or the lycées of France. Taken in the lump, high school education was considered the worst in the sphere of Calcutta University.<sup>48</sup>

Since the opening of the Hindu College, the cause of higher education made steady lee-way with the Government and the people. Some Government schools were expanded into Colleges, as at Dacca (1841), Krishnagar (1845), Berhampore (1853), everywhere with generous local donations. Missionary enterprise supplemented its earlier activities with new institutions such as those of Doveton, La Martiniere and St. Paul's and of the London Missionary Society. In 1855 the Hindu College was transformed into the Presidency College, open to all communities, with liberal provisions for Arts, Science, Medicine, Law and Civil Engineering. The Despatch of 1854, as has been already observed, gave tardy recognition to the recommendation of the Council of Education in 1845 and suggested the opening of Universities on the model of London. The Calcutta University was constituted by Act II of 1857 as an examining and regulating body. But the Indian universities were set up, from the very beginning, "not as corporations of scholars, but corporations of administrators, they had nothing to do directly with the training of men but only with the examining of candidates". The adoption of the affiliating rather than the federal type of University left the colleges to shift for themselves, once the affiliation was secured; and there was no safeguard against their falling below the standard. There was a tendency to drab uniformity in the courses pursued with utter disregard of the eminently practical issues underlined in Wood's Despatch. As Law and Public service each attracted about a third of the total of 11,589 students who obtained arts degree between 1854 and 1882, the degree was in hot favour. It was sought with a keenness and eagerness which made Sir Henry Maine observe in his Convocation Address to the Calcutta University in 1866 that "the thing must be seen to be believed". In the same address occurs the pregnant remark, "The fact is, that the founders of the University of Calcutta thought to create an aristocratic institution; and in spite of themselves, they have created a popular institution". Meanwhile, the revised Regulation of the University in 1862 betrayed a strange lack of imagination by the exclusion of the Vernacular in the answer of all subjects other than the Vernacular in the Entrance examination. A new leaf in the chapter of collegiate education in Bengal was opened when indigenous enterprise, hitherto shy in this sphere, was boldly expressed by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar who converted the Metropolitan Institution into a college which was soon raised to the first grade in 1879. The high percentage of success obtained by its students in the University examinations demolished the old prejudice against Indian management and the capacity of the Indians for teaching English creditably in higher stages.



By 1881-82 the number of colleges rose to 12 Government and 5 aided and 3 unaided ones. But, as was significantly noted by the Hunter Commission, no college had been brought into existence by the system of aid; the 5 colleges that received aid pre-existed the aid system. The Hunter Commission recommended the closure of certain Government colleges, which had been shown to be unsuccessful or highly expensive and the transfer of certain others to bodies of local gentlemen under proper guarantees. Fortunately for the country the last part of this admittedly retrograde measure was ignored. In pursuance of the first recommendation, the Government relinquished its responsibility for the Midnapore College which was entrusted to a municipality in 1887. The Berhampore College was saved from imminent extinction and was even expanded by the princely philanthropy of Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nundy. This policy of the Government gave rise to keen disaffection that was voiced forth by the Calcutta Students' Association founded by A. M. Bose in 1876. The Hindu School theatre became the forum of a democratic students' movement spurred into ebullient activity by the spirited leadership of Surendra Nath Banerjee who was then a professor. The cultivation of English language and the vitalising impact of European liberal ideas derived from Hume, Spencer, Comte, Mazzini, etc., furnished the common linguistic medium and the common stock of political concepts with which to ventilate grievances on an inter-provincial basis through the Indian Association and the Indian National Congress. The close parallelism between the rising tide of national movement and the swelling volume of higher education is obvious.

The period 1882 to 1902 witnessed a remarkable development of colleges not only in Calcutta where the fee-funds combined with cheese-paring economy managed to keep them alive, but also in the mufussil "where local Zamindars provided the building and in some cases contributed to the upkeep, but the cost of maintenance was met out of fees and Government grants".<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the recommendations of the Hunter Commission had the opposite effect and were instrumental in raising the number of colleges to 20 in Calcutta and 26 in the province. Most of these thrived as "coaching institutions rather than as places of learning". The losing grip of Government in this sphere was apparent from the fact that only one-fourth of the total of 8,150 students were receiving education in Government colleges in 1902, while the corresponding proportion in 1881-82 had been nearly two-thirds.

The transformation of the London University to a teaching one by the Act of 1898 led to a reassessment of educational policy in India. The Simla Conference of 1901 which kept Indian educationists out, gratuitously sowed suspicion which was intensified by the overbearing manner of Lord Curzon and his caustic philippics, notably about the mendacity of the Indians. The Indian Universities Commission (1902) grudgingly admitted a solitary Indian member, Sir Gurudas Banerjee, as an after-thought and his sagacious note of dissent was duly recorded. Its recommendations



provoked a 'sustained chorus of disapproval' but they were none the less embodied in the Indian Universities Act (1904). The Act permitted the Universities to assume the responsibility "for the instruction of students with power to appoint University Professors and Lecturers"—a halting clause, but it enabled Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee to open out a noble vista for research and advancement of learning for the University of Calcutta in future. The membership of the Senate as the legal body corporate of the University was reduced to a more workable size from 200 to 100. A democratic flavour was added by the provision that 10 were to be nominated by the Faculties and 10 to be chosen by the graduates. The remainder were to be nominated by the Chancellor, subject to the proviso that two-fifths of the ordinary Fellows were to be teachers. The Syndicate, as the Executive, received legal recognition which it had lacked hitherto. It was radically overhauled with a minimum quota secured for teachers—but only teachers who were members of the Senate. "It was therefore only a half-hearted and imperfect advance that was made towards that constant and vital consultation of teachers which is of the essence of a genuine teaching University".<sup>50</sup> But on the crucial issue which had provoked a storm of opposition from Ashutosh Mookherjee and G. K. Gokhale, popular apprehension proved well-founded. The Act empowered the Chancellor to nominate 80% of the members and refuse approval to the election of the rest. Not only was the approval of the Government obligatory for appointments, regulations, affiliation and disaffiliation etc., but the Government gained the right which it had not possessed before viz., of initiating measures. The Calcutta University Commission (1917) made the candid admission that the Universities of India became under this Act "in theory, if not in practice, the most completely governmental Universities in the world". Gokhale's heart "was chilled to death" to find "the perpetuation of narrow, bigoted and inexpansive rule of experts".<sup>51</sup> The Government in practice, disabused the minds of the people of their fears of a European preponderance in the Senate by nominating 43 Indians to 41 Europeans in the first Senate of the Calcutta University. But the number of students who flocked to the Colleges went on increasing by leaps and bounds. Ill-equipped colleges sustained by meagre fee-revenue reared their heads ominously in larger numbers to confront the educationists with a sheaf of unsolved and thorny problems. Yet at the back of this inflation, haunted a shadow of despair that was sadly reflected in the timely observation of the learned Principal of the leading College of the province.<sup>52</sup> "The failure with which the University is reproached is a failure in practical results. It is said that the men it turns out are not educated in true sense, that the education it gives is largely a sham education..... Defective English, on the one hand, and on the other, reliance on merely verbal memory are the two ingrained faults which vitiate the whole education". The gravamen of this indictment has not lost its sting even today. The Partition of Bengal precipitated the distrust of the Government which



the University Act of 1904 had instigated and during the hectic years that followed, the students flung themselves with headlong zeal to the movement for unsettling the settled fact.

It is a paradox of Indian society that female education throughout the century should be found limping far behind. It was under the ban of an obscurantist social order that prescribed early marriage and purdah and threatened the educated female with the grim shadow of widowhood. Some education was often stealthily imparted to girls of aristocratic families to enable them to manage their estates in the event of their husbands' death. Buchanan Hamilton observed in Rangpore that such women of rank "were considered as intolerable nuisances by the sharks who preyed on their husbands". In the reminiscences of her early life, (which fell in with the first years of the nineteenth century) by Rasasundari Devi, we have a vivid glimpse of the social odium that was the lot of the woman who sought education in defiance of convention, and of how she had to elude it by burning mid-night lamp to eke out the rudiments of learning<sup>53</sup>. The modicum of education which the ladies of the Tagore family of Jorasanko, or of the family of Raja Baidyanath Roy were permitted to receive from Vaisnavis are instances of exception that proved the rigours of the rule. Indeed, some of these ladies acquired rare distinction for scholarship in their days<sup>54</sup>. The earliest recorded venture for female education was made by the Female Juvenile Society in 1819. Public opinion in England was roused in its favour by the fervent advocacy of Ward of Serampore who had been convalescing there since May, 1818. The Society took up the publication of the 'Stri-Siksha-Vidhayaka' of Gourmohan Vidyalamkara. It recommended portions of the book as the text for its schools, which according to the eleventh Report of the Society, appear to have extended to Katwa and Birbhum and contained 500 girls. This was followed up by the "Ladies' Society for Native Female Education in Calcutta and its vicinity". Under the able guidance of Miss Cook the Society made steady progress and opened the Calcutta Female Schools in 1828 for which Raja Baidyanath Roy made a generous donation of Rs. 20,000/-. Miss Cook received unstinted assistance from natives and even Muslim ladies offered active co-operation in their locality. The Society set up a network of schools spreading up from Calcutta to Allaha-bad<sup>55</sup>. The Ladies' Association was started in 1825 as an auxiliary organ of the above and their Normal Training School survived till 1866-67 when it was mentioned as receiving grant-in-aid of Rs. 825/-<sup>56</sup>. A missionary noted in 1855, "Almost every mission has at one time or another attempted to establish schools and many wives of missionaries have laboured unobtrusively in this department of hard work"<sup>57</sup>. But their heroic efforts had yielded discouragingly poor results. Adam remarks in 1838, "It is only children of the very poorest and lowest castes that attend the girls' schools and their attendance is avowedly purchased". . . . often by small daily cash rewards for presence<sup>58</sup>. The highlights of Hindu society were not opposed to female education on principle. But they were even-



tually scared stiff by the inescapable necessity of entrusting it to Christian ladies who alone were at that time fitted for the task. During 1821 and 1822 Radhakanta Dev invited the girls of the Female Juvenile Society to sit for the periodical examinations held in his palace under the auspices of the Calcutta School of which he was the Native Secretary. In 1822, 40 girls appeared in this test. But the ardour of the host soon cooled down and the girl students ceased to appear from 1824. A note of warning against the danger of infiltration of Christian influences in the sanctum of the Hindu home was sounded by Prosunno Kumar Tagore in his 'Reformer' in 1831. It was the agency and not the cause that stood condemned. Not only 'Young Bengal' went ahead in their advocacy of female education, through their literary organ, the 'Parthenon', but mature and orthodox leaders like the millionaire Mutty Lall Seal, and Haladhar Mullick proposed in 1837 to form an association for the purpose. Female education was the theme of prize essays by young intellectuals like K. M. Banerjee, Madhusudan Dutta and Bhudev Mukherjee. The need of female education was urged by the President of the British Indian Society of Calcutta in 1845. The offer by Joykissen Mukherjee of Uttarpara in the same year to open a female school was "curtly declined by the Government partly on the score of funds, partly on the novel nature of the experiment".<sup>59</sup> The zeal of Peary Chand Sircar was responsible for the opening of a female school at Baraset in 1847. But "charges of assault, suits of arrears of rent and complaints of all kinds and character were brought against the parents of those who sent their daughters to the school". Hence J.E.D. Bethune was under no illusion of facile success when he opened his historic institution. Wishing the discredit of failure to rest on himself alone, he was chary of pledging the credit of the Government to this dubious experiment until its success was assured. With stoic detachment he felt it essential to exclude religious instruction altogether, even though he was a devout Christian, and to invest female education with respectability by only admitting girls high in the social scale. This was the vindication of the Filtration theory in a new sphere. English was to be taught only to those who expressly desired it. The Calcutta Female School was started by Bethune in 1849 with only 11 pupils. Rajnarain Basu in his '*Atmacharita*' gives an amusing reminiscence of the Freemasons celebrating the event by a procession with music and band. From its inception the cause evoked the hearty co-operation of Ramgopal Ghose and Dakshinaranjan Mookherjee and it soon enlisted the ardent assistance of Vidyasagar and his friend Madanmohan Tarakalankar. The roll strength of the school dwindled to 7 and its maintenance was the toil of Sisyphus for its founder whom it cost Rs. 800/- a month. After Bethune's death in August 1851, the expenses were borne by his admiring friend, Lord Dalhousie. The frank approval of female education in Wood's Despatch encouraged the Government to take charge of the institution in 1856. It is first mentioned as Bethune School in the Report for 1862-63. Vidyasagar was encouraged by the Lt. Governor of Bengal



to open 20 girls' schools in 4 districts in 1855. But these came to an abrupt end because of the close-fisted financial policy of the Government of India. Keshab Chandra Sen took the cue from the missionaries in organising the zenana education in 1863 and the *Bama-Bodhini Patrika* was started for propagation of useful knowledge among women. Mary Carpenter's experiment of a non-denominational Normal school failed to contend against what Vidyasagar had correctly foreboded, viz., "the insuperable barrier of the social prejudices of my countrymen" and it collapsed after a brief existence of three years in 1872. Better success attended the efforts of Brahmo leaders who organised a Female and an Adult Normal School on an improved standard on February 1, 1871. The Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya of Miss. Ackroyd (1873-76), was closed with her marriage, but her fitting enthusiasm for the cause had already cooled down with her discouraging experience of her Indian collaborators and of the way of life of women in the homes of Indians with the highest education. The school was, however, revived under a new name and it continued until its final absorption with the Bethune School in 1878. The conferring of the B.A. degree on the first lady graduates, Chandramukhi Bose and Kadambini Ganguli in the Convocation of 1883 was characterised by the Vice-Chancellor as registering a landmark in the educational history of India. The zenana associations organised by missionaries or by the Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha (1864) rendered valuable service and the total number of girls receiving this form of instruction at home by visiting teachers was estimated in 1883 at 50,000<sup>60</sup>. Local associations with similar object were started during the next 20 years all over the country at Sylhet, Vikrampore, Faridpore, Bakharganj, Mymensingh, Tipperah, etc.<sup>61</sup> The unremitting labours of Dwarkanath Gangopadhyaya in this cause won for him the popular epithet of Abala-Bandhava. In recognition of the utility of the zenana system of education, it was taken up in a limited measure by the Government in 1902 when 12 Hindu and Muslim peripatetic teachers were appointed. The bar to the admission of women to the Medical College was removed by the salutary intervention of Sir Rivers Thompson in 1881. The Victoria School was revived in 1886. In 1887-88 the Eden Female School, Dacca was raised to the status of a high school while the only unaided girls' school, the Brahmo Balika Vidyalaya sent students for the Entrance examination in 1891. The Bethune School expanded to a full-fledged College in 1888, though College classes had been attached to it since 1878 and the M.A. classes in English and Philosophy were opened in 1903. An attempt to adapt the education of girls to the strict scriptural injunctions of the Hindus was made in the Mahakali Pathshala by an ascetic lady from the Deccan in 1893. Sister Nivedita's school at Baghbazar, Calcutta in 1892 was an opportune measure for lending a utilitarian slant to female education. The Government Resolution of 1902 rightly realised that through female education "a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and the moral tone of the people than by the education of men". In pursuance of the



recommendations of the University Commission special provisions relating to syllabus were formulated by the Calcutta University for Female candidates and very indulgent conditions were prescribed for their admission to its examinations with a view to help the expansion of higher education. In 1900-01 only 2.49 percent of the girls received any education whatsoever. In 1906-07 there were only 21 girls in Colleges, 680 in H. E. Schools, 1776 in M.E. and 653 in M.V. Schools. A century of exertion yielded results which are notable only as a record of aspiration rather than of achievement.

The ferment of English education had produced its scum along with its elixir of a richer life. In the case of boys who had received English education, Rajnarain Basu deplored their self-centred individualism, their tortuous cunning ways, the lowering of filial devotion and their mimicry of tawdry European fashions and manners. The 'Model Bhagini' (1884-86) of Jogendra Chandra Basu, written in the vein of Moliere's 'Femmes Savantes', is a mordant satire on the mawkish sentimentality of the English-educated Woman, her foppishness, snobbery, romantic affectations and her idly busy philandering. The Khas-Dakhal of Amritalal Basu is a later echo of this mocking banter. But these comic hyperboles should not be permitted to obscure the sterling virtues promoted by education and expressed in various enduring achievements. The Bengali woman made her debut in literature in 1856 with the poetical work Chittavilasinii by Krishna Kamini Dasi. Articles by women began to appear in journals. The first female venture in journalism was the short-lived fortnightly paper 'Bangamahila', published on April 13, 1870. It was followed by 'Hindulalana' which appeared in 1878. Thakamani Devi showed the way for a monthly paper with a melancholy cognomen, the 'Anathini'. The 'Bharati' was edited with enviable distinction from 1885 by Swarnakumari Devi and later on, by Hiranmayee Devi and Sarala Devi. The 'Bangabasinii' was a weekly paper that was edited by a woman towards the close of 1883. A model for a hebdomadal journal was set by Jnanadanandini Devi who edited the *Balaka* from April 1885. A flutter in higher levels of society heralding a distant social revolution was created, by the same lady on her appearing in a Government levée in the company of her husband, Satyendra Nath Tagore of the Indian Civil Service. A Bengali lady moved a vote of thanks to the chair in the Indian National Congress at Bombay in 1889. As a work of happy augury of the noble role the Bengali woman was to play in the future struggle for national liberation Sarala Devi organised a choir of 55 women to sing a national anthem of her own composition in the Congress session of 1901.

Indigenous learning was not entirely supplanted by the triumphant march of western education. The religious and ceremonial implications of oriental studies wove them into the social fabric of the Hindus and the Muslims and ensured their continuance. But in a changing economic order where the customary avenues of employment were being closed down, purely oriental scholarship was bound to prove a costly anachronism.



The decay of Tols and Madrassas was an illustration of the atrophy of cultures severed from their social moorings. The Calcutta Sanskrit College, since its foundation, has been conceived as the official organ for indigenous Hindu learning. It showed rigid adherence to tradition in its course of studies, its list of holidays and in its proud exclusion of all castes except the Brahmins and the Vaidyas from its sacred preserve. English was hesitantly introduced as an optional subject during 1827 to 1835. The teaching of English provoked sarcastic comments in the native press to the effect that this meagre dose of English did more harm than good. It was apprehended that this would alienate from the hapless students the reverence of their hereditary spiritual disciplines without qualifying them even for the clerkship, not to speak of a professorship in English<sup>62</sup>. Provision was made for the translation of the various works on Natural philosophy, geography and history into Bengali. Lectures were delivered on European medical principles accompanied with dissection of the softer parts of animals. In 1835, with the foundation of the Calcutta Medical College, this part of the College study lost its *raison d'être* and was discontinued. A thorough-going renovation of the institution was effected during 1851-53 by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar whose Principalship left the indelible stamp of his unique personality on the course of studies and discipline. Reforms crowded upon reforms with breath-taking rapidity. The doors of the College were flung open to Kayasthas in January 1851, and to all classes of respectable Hindus in December 1854. A modest tuition fee was instituted with enhanced stress on discipline and regularity of attendance. English was reintroduced, but with added emphasis as a compulsory subject and Mathematics was to be studied in English. The curriculum was thoroughly recast on a utilitarian basis. Graduates of this College were made eligible for the post of Deputy Magistrates. Two masterly manuals of Sanskrit grammar were composed by Iswarchandra to replace the grinding *Mugdhabodha* which had hitherto proved a bugbear to young learners of Sanskrit. His reforms tended greatly to the fulfilment of his "sanguine hopes" that the College should become "a seat of pure and profound Sanskrit learning and at the same time a nursery of improved Vernacular literature, and of teachers thoroughly qualified to disseminate that literature among the masses of his fellow-countrymen".

A survey of the achievements of the professors and alumni of the college not only illustrates the richness of their contribution to Bengali literature and Sanskrit culture but also dispels the popular myth of their having been stark social reactionaries. Ramchandra Tarkabagish, the same man who compiled the first Bengali dictionary, forestalled Vidyasagar in his advocacy of widow-marriage, and the first to practise it was Srishchandra Vidyaratna. The first Bengali journal *Samachar-Darpana* owed much to the literary labour of Pandit Jaygopal Tarkalamkar, from its first publication till 1823. Frankrishna Vidyasagar was a Sanskrit poet of no mean repute and besides, he edited with great success, the *Samachar*



*Chandrika*, founded by Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyaya. The acute intellect and prodigious learning of Jaynarayan Tarkapanchanan made him the foremost exponent of Nyaya of his day. But his mind was never petrified by canons and conventions and retained its receptivity to new truths from the west. To a later generation of luminaries belong the poet, Beharilal Chakravarty, the versatile Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, Taranath Tarkavachaspati with his opus magnus, the Vachaspati lexicon. Dwarakanath Vidyabhusan of *Somaprakasa* fame and his nephew, Shivanath Sastri, the scholarly reformer, Ramnarayan Tarkaratna, the dramatist and a galaxy of names. While Vidyasagar's scheme of re-organisation was amply vindicated by the magnitude of its success, it had also its detractors among sympathetic and sagacious critics. On 14 March 1859, the learned E. B. Cowell in his report to the Director of Public Instruction observed, 'The great want in our studies appears to be the absence of contact with reality.' In a letter to the same authority on 6 October 1858 Dr. E. Roer, the Inspector of Schools of South West Bengal, expressed satisfaction with the efficiency of teaching in the Sanskrit College and the distinction attained by its students as 'Moonsiffs and Principal Sadar Ameen'. But he also remarked that "its studies are medieval. Its students have no opening". From the letters of the Principal of the Sanskrit College on the 13th and the 23rd April, 1872 to the D.P.I., it appears that the college had meanwhile grown to an Anglo-Sanskrit institution where no pupils learned Sanskrit alone or English alone, even though the rules did not prevent anyone from taking up purely Sanskrit studies. The Lieutenant Governor came to the conclusion "that the school department attached to the college had been of late years turned to a sectarian institution for the education of the Hindus at a cheap rate, but at great expenditure to the Government." Hence he recommended that it should be made to pay its own way or be closed down. One is reminded of a similar plea put forward by Woodrow in his Minute in 1859. In 1872 the third and the fourth year classes were transferred to the Presidency College and in spite of vigorous protests from native organs like the British Indian Association, the Professorship of Hindu Law was abolished. In the above-mentioned letters of 23 April, 1872, the Principal had observed, inter alia, that "abolition of English in the Sanskrit College will lead at once to an withdrawal of the entire body of students and thus to a closing of the College.....and the Pundits of Calcutta, I feel certain, would withdraw their boys from the Sanskrit College, if English were abolished". But in spite of its undoubted popularity, the modernised scheme of Sanskrit instruction roused lively apprehension in another quarter.<sup>68</sup> The new system dwarfed the Tol department for a time to insignificance, till it was resuscitated by Mm. Maheshchandra Nyayaratna who in 1881 opened the 'titles' (Upadhi) classes with 25 free students to serve as a model Tol and "to impart traditional interpretation of the sacred books on orthodox lines". In 1891 a survey of the Tols of Bengal, Behar and Orissa was conducted by the same Pandit whose Report embraced 761 Tols besides others which he did not



visit. The total attendance in Tols estimated at 16,000 to 17,000 pupils. It was found that "most of the best Pandits of Bengal and all the Mahamahopadhyayas without exception" were giving their wards an English education. Mahesh Nyayaratna, a Pandit of the highest eminence, kept pace with the times by giving his sons a thorough English education. The novel 'Jugantar' by Shivnath Sastri graphically illustrates this ideological conflict in the family of a venerable Pandit of the old tradition whose elder sons received Tol education while the youngest son and the grandson are sent to the Hindu College. In his own life, Shivnath Sastri stood at this cross-road of cultures when, as the son of a Pandit of stern orthodoxy he chose the highest University education and the career of a social and religious reformer. But the Tols suffered not only from desertion within its ranks. The Commission made the further depressing observation that "the aggregate intellectual capacity of the present generation of Tol students is lower than that of the past generation as unquestionably as the number is lower" and that the decline on both counts was progressive.<sup>64</sup> The Tol instruction, though on the wane, was yet found to possess greater vitality in Bengal than in the neighbouring provinces. The usual practice of gratuitous maintenance of students by the Pandits could not be observed in Nadia presumably because of the influx of large number of pupils combined with shrinkage of donations. But a few Pandits still struggled desperately to keep up the ancient tradition while in the remaining Tols, Government grants supplemented by occasional gifts of the Rajas provided for the austere living of inmates of the Pucca (brick-built) and the Kaccha (mud-built) Tols at about Rs. 3 per head per month. The chief subjects of study were Nyaya, which always continued to be in special favour in Bengal as the noblest form of intellectual discipline, the compends of the Smriti of Raghunandan and grammatical works from which Panini was significantly excluded, except in a few Tols in Rajshahi. The Ayurveda was studied in Calcutta, Mankar (Burdwan), Jangalpara (Hooghly), Bankul (Howrah), and Vikrampur (Dacca). The order of precedence among scholars assigned the first place to experts in Nyaya and prescribed a diminishing scale of presents (Vidaya) to scholars in Vedanta, Samkhya, Smriti, Purana and Sabdashastra. The last branch of study including Kavya and Vyakarana was derided as a weaker intellectual performance. It was shunned in the Tols of Nadia till 1864 when Cowell visited them and it was relegated to Akharas or inferior establishments conducted by pupils, though Bhatpara had always taken kindly to these studies. The inclusion of this branch of study in the syllabus of the Title examination and the demand for its adepts as school Pandits led to its later incorporation in the curricula of the Nadia Tols. Really good Tols still lingered on in the interior of Burdwan, at Bakla-Chandradwip and Vikrampur, and at Berhampur, Tribeni, Purbasthali, Bhatpara, Chinsurah, Mulajore and Nadia but their number was steadily falling off. A glorious recent addition was the Visvanath Chatuspathi created out of the munificent endowment of Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya whose life and



teachings alike symbolised the best that he found in the cultures of the East and the West. But the Tols were not prosperous in Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Rangpore. In Nadia, E. B. Cowell in his report to the Director of Public Instruction on 17th January, 1867, recorded the existence of 12 Tols with 150 pupils. In 1891 these had dwindled to 8 Tols with 99 students only. Numerical decline did not impair the prestige of the Tol Pandits who were described by the Inspector of Schools in the Dacca Division in 1867 as persons who "exercise more supremacy over the minds of the people than any other class". An examining association to confer titles was formed by the Dacca Saraswat Samaj in 1878, to be followed by similar local associations of secular or religious character till the Government, on the advice of Mahesh Nyayaratna, introduced in 1884 the uniform title of Tirtha in various subjects. The innovation proved immensely popular to Sanskrit students. In pursuance of the recommendations of the Commission of 1891, non-pensionary allowances were granted to Pandits of certain selected Tols with rewards in the form of annual stipends to students and teachers both, on the result of the examination. An attempt at securing uniformity of standard by centralising the examinations of the various Associations under a common body presided over by the Principal of the Sanskrit College in 1897 attained a large measure of success because it secured better training. But it gave rise to grave resentment because of the exclusion of eminent Pandits from the Board regulating the syllabus and examination. The Pandits stood away in sulky silence which impelled revision of policy and resulted in the formation by the Government in 1908 of the Board of Sanskrit Examination composed of eminent Pandits of the orthodox type as well as of the western variety. This well-timed measure arrested the decline in the number of examinees which had been steadily going on of late.

The sterility of Muhammadan intellect in Bengal and the general apathy of the community to education formed an intriguing problem that still awaits a clear analysis. The widespread poverty of its members in a tottering social order, the conceit of by-gone glory and exaggerated fear of the traditional faith being tarnished with the heresy of the new learning or by contact with the culture of the majority of Hindu fellow students might have conspired to keep the Muslims away from English schools and native Pathshalas. In 1871 their proportion to the total number of pupils in schools in Bengal was only 14·4%, and in colleges barely 5%, while they constituted 32·3% of the population. Evidently the Muhammadans exhibited lesser capacity for adaptation to the new environment than the high-caste Hindus who left the tols only to swell the registers of colleges. But the Muslim centres of indigenous learning for which the upper classes still cherished nostalgic affection and religious reverence were fast sinking into stupor of decadence. This was due as much to want of patronage from without as to listlessness of scholars within them. The pupils of the Imambara School at Hooghly before its merger with the Hooghly College were characterised by Macaulay in 1836 as "lazy, stupid school boys of



30 with large families which are subsisting on funds designed for education" as stipends.<sup>65</sup>

The Anglo-Persian classes attached to the Hooghly College since its foundation in 1836 were attended chiefly by the Hindus to escape fees, while the majority of the Muhammadan pupils were described by the Principal as "too old to make any progress in English and are besides very irregular in their attendance". The abolition of the Madrassa section was recommended by the Principal in 1858. But the protective clauses of the Mohsin grant saved it from extinction. Nor did the Calcutta Madrassa present a more enlivening prospect. Warren Hastings had considered its foundation in 1781 as a timely measure to arrest the decline of "erudition in the Arabic and Persian languages and in the complicated system of laws founded on the tenets of religion". But the adoption of the Nizamiah syllabus, then in vogue in Buhar and other reputed Madrassas of Bengal, was to prove a costly blunder. This was based on the neglect of the Hadis and Tafsir which have been the fountain-head of Islamic culture and had the effect of alienating the scholars from the current of Islamic thought in India and abroad. The syllabus remained a chronic theme of complaint from competent critics as being weak in its Islamic and faulty in its practical aspects. In spite of the allurements of free tuition and stipends the Calcutta Madrassa was never thronged with eager learners. Its curriculum had a utilitarian bias and was devised to train students for the career of law officers. In 1835 the course extended to seven years comprising law in all classes and Company's Regulation from the fifth year onwards. An English class, formed in 1826, was converted to an English school open to all in 1829; but it was shunned by scholars of the Arabic foundation. Students were as reluctant to learn English as they were contemptuous of their vernacular which was Bengali. The 8000 Muslim students who protested against the historic Resolution of March 7, 1835 could discover in it nothing better than "the evident object of the conversion of Indians to Christianity". In 1847 Anglo-Arabic classes were opened with high hopes which were rudely shattered. It was no gratifying record for the section that not more than 2 students secured the Junior Scholarship in 22 years of its history. Dr. Sprenger's experiment of reforms undertaken on his own initiative led to grave disturbances which could be quelled only with police intervention. Indeed, discipline had never been a strong feature of this institution. In 1791 the Board of Revenue was conscious of culpable mismanagement and of the existence of spurious students who appeared only once a month in the College to receive their stipends. A daring burglary in the city was ascribed by the police to its pupils. The introduction of the system of public examination in the Town Hall in 1821 roused a storm of protest from teachers as well as students. In 1842 discipline was reported to be loose and unsatisfactory. The professors continued to be sulky at every scheme of reform. On June 11, 1858, Principal Lees issued the peremptory order that "if professors do not abandon the exploded methods of teaching by



parrot-like memorisation and render active support to the Principal in improvement of the College, the Arabic Department of this College be abolished as an useless encumbrance to the state". This produced a chastening effect and an improvement in attitude was reported in 1862. But again in 1871 the D.P.I. made a painful allusion to "repeated disturbances in which students as well as teachers are implicated and of gross misconduct of a kind which I need not here describe". But in spite of sporadic unsavoury episodes the Madrassa was described by W. N. Lees in his report of 11 Dec. 1862 to the Director of Public Instruction, as enjoying a reputation that extended to the south of India and as far as Bombay on the west. In North India it was outrivalled by old orthodox institutions.

After the enthusiastic innovations of Dr. Sprenger had ended in a fiasco, the Council of Education in 1853 recommended the replacement of the English and the Arabic classes by newly organised Anglo-Persian classes. Henceforth the Madrassa was to "consist of two distinct and separate schools having different courses of study and different objects. Western and Eastern learning are completely dissociated". While the Anglo-Persian section prospered as the conventional High English school, the Madrassa was re-organised by Sir George Campbell in 1873 to realise "the-Muslim idea of liberal education." The Anglo-Persian school was promoted to a college in 1867 which soon withered into a phantom institution with not a single student on its roll in 1869-70. In pursuance of the recommendations of the Committee of Inquiry in 1869, the college classes were closed but admission for a few Muslim students was secured in the Presidency College at charitably low fees. The economic alignment behind Madrassa education is highly significant of its crumbling social buttress. It was revealed by the Commission of Inquiry, 1869 that 80% of the pupils of the Calcutta and the Hooghly Madrassas hailed from economically backward tracts beyond the Brahmaputra and East Bengal and these were attracted by the prospect of free boarding with charitable gentlemen of their community or with butlers of Europeans, besides stipends and free tuition. But an overwhelming majority of pupils from Calcutta and its suburbs invariably flocked to English schools. It was computed by the Principal of Hooghly College that during 1860-1869 only 21 out of 91 students from his Madrassa secured employments whose maximum salary was Rs. 20/- a month. According to the Minutes on the Hooghly Madrassa published by Abdul Latif Khan in 1877 the careers open to Madrassa students were those of law officers or advisers, teachers, Police staff, Regimental Moonshees and Clergy.

In 1872 the Government removed a long-standing grievance of the Muslims by providing a separate grant for the Hooghly College and by devoting the Mohsin endowment thus released to the establishment of Madrassas at Dacca, Rajshahi and Chittagong, besides scholarships and substantial concessions in fees for Muslim students in English institutions. In 1882 Ameer Ali stood alone in pleading before the Indian



Education Commission for making English compulsory at all stages from the middle class onwards. But he was opposed by Moulvi Abdul Latif Khan<sup>66</sup>. In the memorial presented before the above Commission by the National Muhammadan Association of Calcutta it was alleged that the resumption between 1828 and 1846 of revenue-free grants to men of learning and the replacement of Persian by English or the vernacular in administration were primarily responsible for Muslim decadence. But the Commission brushed aside these contentions on the ground that the revenue-free lands were never resumed, but were only taxed at a low rate, and that these changes concerned the Hindus equally without producing any baneful consequence on their education and culture. During the last two decades of the 19th century Madrasa education remained in a static condition though the English classes of the Calcutta Madrasa gained in popularity. In pursuance of the recommendation of a non-official conference, the Government in its resolution of February 24, 1903 approved the scheme of title examinations on law, literature and theology on the same lines as the Sanskrit Examinations. The Government in its Report of Education in Bengal in 1904-05 announced the adoption of a new course of studies for Muktabs. Special Urdu Inspectors were to be appointed to stimulate Muslim education in Bengal. But insistence on an exclusively denominational education proved a dead-weight.<sup>67</sup> Cultural isolation fostered fragmentary political thinking which thwarted national integration.

From the earliest days of the Calcutta University no professional study proved more popular than law which was pursued for its practical benefits as well as for the excellent training it afforded for public life which had an irresistible lure for the educated classes. Organs of national agitation were led or sponsored by lawyers in such a large measure in the last quarter of the century that the movement came to be dubbed as the Vakil Raj. It was observed in 1893 that the aspiration of the zilla school-masters tended more towards municipal politics than to their own extra-curricular activities<sup>68</sup>. No less than 581 of the 1589 arts graduates of the University between 1857 and 1887 adopted the legal profession for which the Bengalis evinced unusual aptitude and devotion. Yet paradoxically enough, in no other branch of study was the provision of instruction more neglected, and no college exclusively intended for the study of law existed till 1908.

The anomalous state of affairs was largely the outcome of inevitable historical exigency. Since the last quarter of the eighteenth century the legal system was being thrown in an increasingly helpless quandary. The foundation of criminal law rested ostensibly on the Muhammadan code but it was shorn of its objectionable features by the gradual replacement of Muslim law of evidence and punishment by intermittent Regulations of the East India Company from 1772 onwards. Marriage, property and succession still continued to be regulated by the distinctive laws of the respective communities. Sweeping changes in land tenure had been



effected by the East India Company at different stages. Access to these divergent systems of law could be obtained through erudite compilations like Colebrooke's celebrated work on Hindu law and his Digest of Regulations (1807), W. H. Macnaghten's Hindu Law (1829), Hamilton's Hedayya, Halhead's Gentoo Law, H. H. Wilson's Anglo-Mahomedan Law, Whitley Stoke's Supplement to the Anglo-Indian Codes, Sir Archibald Galloway's Observations on the Law, etc., of India (1825) and the various digests and analyses prepared by Beaufort, Morley, Stanley, Harrington, etc. The Serampore press brought forth useful manuals for the aid of students. The Madrassas trained pupils for the legal career and a few posts of Judge-Pundits for the exposition of Hindu law to assist the judge were open to students of the Sanskrit College. The systematic study of law was impeded by the curious medley of legal systems and Regulations, all of which were in danger of being supplanted by the long-drawn labours of the Law Commission which came to be set up in 1833. By Act of 1814 the profession of law was restricted to Hindus and Muslims educated in the Government Colleges only. Act I of 1846 opened the office of a lawyer to persons passing a test conducted by a Sudder Court, without making any arrangement for their previous training. The General Committee of Public Instruction had already recognised the importance of this branch of study by the appointment in August 1831 of a Professor of Law and Political Economy who resigned after two months for a more lucrative practice. Sir John Peter Grant occupied the office for two months in 1831 before his elevation to the bench of the Supreme Court. In 1834 the Committee contented itself with the choice of a modest successor on the dubious merit of his being one "who was not encumbered with a large practice" and who would be at least in advance of his pupils. Lectures were delivered freely by the Advocate-General during 1843-44, but were discontinued on his untimely death.<sup>69</sup> In 1851 a professor of law was appointed to the Hindu College. The feeling had come to prevail that legal skill was a craftsmanship to be acquired by apprenticeship and practice, rather than a technique, to be mastered by rigorous academic discipline. It was only in pursuance of the emphatic recommendation of the Despatch of 1854 "for attendance in certain lectures and the attainment of a degree in law" as "necessary qualifications for Vakeels and Moonshiffs" that regular law classes were attached to the Presidency College in 1857. Other Government Colleges soon followed the example. In 1882 the Metropolitan Institution opened law classes with a seductively low fee-schedule which resulted in the exodus of most of the law students from the Presidency College. The City College opened law classes in 1883. The Ripon College in 1885 fixed the fee still lower at a uniform Rs. 3/- for all classes so that others were compelled to follow suit. This College had discovered the secret of making cheap prices earn higher profits by stimulating the volume of demand; and on its own assessment it incurred a loss of Rs. 10,000/- to Rs. 20,000/- in 1890 when its law classes were



suspended for eight months on account of grave irregularities. In 1892 the syllabus was reduced to one of two years after graduation instead of three years. The Universities Commission (1902) commented on the absence of Central College of law and on the deficiency of students not in book knowledge, "but in the power to apply their knowledge to the cases before them". A liberally endowed Tagore Law Professorship was set up in 1870 by the University and it continued to be the only Chair till the foundation of the University Law College. The Chair has been adorned by a galaxy of legal luminaries whose "lectures have attained the position of standard treatises in their respective subjects while some have taken rank as classics in Indian law".<sup>70</sup> It is not without significance that the vanguard of the national movement has in a large measure been occupied by men in whom the spirit of legalism has inculcated a sturdy independence in the defence of constitutional rights.

The indigenous medical sciences, viz., Ayurveda and the Unani or Tibbi were long sunk into a state of neglect. Buchanan found no person teaching medicine in the district of Dinajpur and indeed, proper physicians "were very few in number". The existence of a medical school in Natore excited considerable interest of Adam in 1835, because it was the only institution of that kind in the district, and he adds that "the number of such institutions throughout Bengal, is, I believe, very limited". Of the medical practitioners of the district only 4 or 5 out of 123 were professionally educated, said Adam, and the rest practised medicine as a crude art without knowing anything of it as a science. Their number was reinforced by a host of conjurers and pretenders who offered their services in the form of herbs, drugs, charms and superstitious mummeries gratuitously though they were frequently rewarded with land and other privileges by an awe-struck and grateful community. Rev. Long wrote in 1855, "Before 1807 there were 50 to 100 native doctors who used to attend the native hospital to study the practice there and introduce it among his countrymen, one of them got so rich as to drive in his own carriage".<sup>71</sup> Western medical instruction began in the School for Native Doctors opened on October 24, 1824, under Dr. Jamieson on the strength of a General Order of June 21, 1822. Provision was made for the teaching of Ayurveda in the Sanskrit College and of the Unani system in the Calcutta Madrassa. The School for Native Doctors produced 166 qualified doctors before it was condemned by a Committee set up in 1833 by Bentinck.<sup>72</sup> The Government order on June 28, 1835 implemented the recommendations of the Committee by the suppression of the school as well as of the medical classes in the Sanskrit College and the Madrassa and by the foundation of the Medical College at Calcutta for imparting a more advanced knowledge solely in English. Many people had grave misgivings about the success of this College though it was enthusiastically supported by Rev. Duff, and also by David Hare who was its first Secretary. Lord Auckland and Dwarkanath Tagore encouraged medical students with offer of prizes. Medical education began primarily as the prerogative of



the Hindus as in 1835 not a single Muhammadan with the necessary knowledge of English could be found in the country for admission to the Medical College. The insuperable Hindu prejudice of defilement by touching the dead was bravely overcome by a group of four students who "at their own solicitation undertook the dissection of the human subject". We are told on the authority of Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar in 1872 that Rajkrishna Dey "was the first to plunge the scalpel into the dead human body" though the honour has been customarily accorded to Madhusudan Gupta.<sup>73</sup> The present hospital was erected in 1852-53 for clinical practice of students. In 1844 four students of the College maintained by the benevolence of Dwarkanath Tagore, Dr. Goodeve and the Nawab Nazim of Bengal, proceeded to England where they won the highest academic laurels. The Hindustani classes were reinstated in 1838 to provide doctors for Civil Hospitals and jails. In 1847 a two years' Apprentice Course was set up for members of the Subordinate Medical Service who could, in the words of Dr. Mouat, "provide the only check on common vendors of poison". In 1864 it was decided to divide the Bengali class into a Native Apothecary Class and a higher class called the Vernacular Licentiate Class, which were opened in 1866-67. These classes were transferred in 1872 to a new school in connection with the Campbell Hospital in order to relieve the growing congestion in the Medical College. The Native Apothecary Class was abolished in a few years. The Dacca Medical School was founded in 1874 for the convenience of East Bengal which had hitherto sent out one-third of the medical students. The school course was extended from three to four years in 1896 when the medium of instruction was converted into English with a view to elevate the standard. The early fears and misgivings about the success of medical education in Bengal were entirely falsified and private schools began to appear. The Calcutta Medical School, founded in 1886, was amalgamated in 1903 with the Calcutta College of Physicians and Surgeons in Bengal eight years after the establishment of the latter, and was removed to its present site at Belgachia where it developed into a magnificent non-Government College. Other mushroom institutions cropped up and came to an abrupt and premature end. But the prestige and popularity of the medical degree rose higher and encouraged many graduates to go abroad for specialised training or for admission to the coveted Indian Medical Service. Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar was a pioneer in starting the Calcutta Medical Journal in 1868 for the advocacy of Homeopathy. The Indian Medical Record which still survives, appeared in 1890 and was followed by other journals of varying scientific value.

The period under review was for the most part devoid of any striking advancement in the cultivation of science, though an awareness of its surpassing importance is evident from official utterances since the earliest times. Section 43 of the Charter Act of 1813, the Resolution of March 7, 1835 and the Education Despatches, all laid equal stress on the propagation of the knowledge of the literature as well as of the sciences of



Europe. In his famous protest of December 11, 1823 Raja Ram Mohun hailed the advent of "useful sciences" "with sanguine hopes". But the pronounced humanistic tendencies of Macaulay chimed well with the literary proclivity induced by traditional learning in Tols and Madrassas and gave to Indian education an over-stressed and lop-sided literary growth. This is in striking contrast to Japan where the new learning of the West made its first impact in medical sciences. "It was followed by Physics, Chemistry, Pharmacology, mathematics and astronomy, to which list military science was added after 1848 and later history, political economy and law. It was, however, not until 1868 when Fukuzawa secured Wayland's ethics that the moral ideas of the west were first introduced. . . . people at first had eyes on the material side of the western civilization and were mostly strangers to the beauty of its spiritual side".<sup>74</sup> The first fruit of western education in Bengal had been a moral awakening which made the educated men proof against bribery in public services. But the lofty tone of public morality born of patriotic ardour was devoid of any enduring achievement in the resuscitation of native arts and crafts or in the organisation of technical institutes of utilitarian character. The aversion to scientific and technical studies of those who proceeded for higher education to England remained a theme of bitter complaint by Rajnarain Bose in his memorable address "Ekal-O-Sekal", (Past and Present) published in 1872. The study of science was introduced in Hindu College in 1824 by Dr. Ross who won from his students the nickname of Soda-Sahib because of his special fancy for this chemical element. Scientific subjects were included in the courses of Junior and Senior scholarship examinations. On November 30, 1822, the Serampore College notified a course of ten lectures on Chemistry with a stiff fee for attendance which presumably was not intended to scare away the listeners. The Calcutta University in its Regulations of 1872 made room for a specialised "B" Course in science for its B.A. Degree, which proved popular only because it was easier. The out-students who were previously permitted to attend the science course in the Presidency College began to fall off as laboratory facilities, hitherto lacking, came to be gradually provided in other Colleges and their number totally disappeared in 1884<sup>75</sup>. Full-fledged B.Sc. Courses were introduced by the University in 1905. The fearless spirit of genuine scientific enquiry was evidenced in the heroic apostasy of Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar M.D., from Allopathy to the pursuit of what he believed to be the truth in much despised Homeopathy in 1887. The Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science came into being in 1876 as the result of his noble efforts. A glorious era of Bengal's original achievement in science was heralded by the paper on the 'Polarisation of electric ray by a crystal' read by Jagadish Chandra Bose before the Asiatic Society in 1895 and the paper by P. C. Roy on mercurious nitrite followed shortly after<sup>76</sup>. The two worthies provided the salt whereof a whole generation of brilliant Bengali scientists have been salted.

Europeans set the pace for scientific works in Bengali with Robert



May's primer on Mathematics in 1817, Felix Carey's treatise on Anatomy and Vidyaharavali, Marshman's Astronomy and John Mack's Elements of Chemistry (Kimiya Vidyar Sar), etc., mostly under the genial inspiration of William Carey. Rammohun Ray tried his skill on a bi-lingual geographical manual, the *Jyagrahi*". The credit of presenting advanced scientific principles in lucid Bengali goes to Akshoy Kumar Dutt whose articles in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* from No. 47 onwards marked the dawn of a new era for scientific literature in Bengali. The writings of Ramendra Sundar Trivedi in the 'Prakriti' from 1896 onwards and in other journals expounded the latest scientific advances of his age with that "profound and orderly understanding by virtue of which principles become luminous".

The General Committee was always alive to the importance of practical instruction and strongly recommended Surveying as useful for employment in the Judicial and Revenue services. The Mechanical Institute was founded by private effort in about 1839 but it petered out after a brief existence. Attention was directed to Civil Engineering during 1843-44 by schemes of public works and railways projected by the Government and a Professorship of the subject was instituted in the Hindu College before 1844-45. As no suitable candidate was found, a nominal appointment was made "by conferring upon one of the Cambridge gentlemen attached to the Hindu College the title of Professor of Civil Engineering".<sup>78</sup> Effective arrangement for the study of Engineering in Bengal was made by the Public Works Department which opened in 1856 a College occupying premises vacated by the Fort William College<sup>79</sup>. It sought affiliation with the Calcutta University in 1857 and was amalgamated with the Presidency College in 1864. During 1869-1875 Col. Nicholls of the P.W.D. repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction about the practical training provided there. The Cadell Committee, set up by the Government in January 1875 strongly urged the necessity of an integrated education under dyarchical control—the theoretical training being under the Education Department and the practical under the Public Works Department. In pursuance of these recommendations, the Government took active steps and the College was removed to its existing site at Sibpur purchased from the authorities of the Bishop's College in 1880, and it received its present name, "Bengal Engineering College" in 1887. A variegated course was provided for: (i) Civil Engineering, (ii) Civil Overseers, (iii) Mechanical Overseers, (iv) Draughtsmen, (v) Skilled Workmen, and (vi) a class for the sons of artisans and Mistris. The Engineering course was extended to a fourth year with a certificate of practical training in the fifth year. The mechanical Engineering classes never got started. Various reports collected in the papers relating to Technical Education in India during 1886 and 1904 condemned the College as a gross failure. In 1883 Heaton, the distinguished Principal of the College, stated in despair that the College had produced on an average only 11.3 B.E.'s. annually, but even these few failed to obtain suitable employment and were often under-employed.



M. Finucane cynically reported that between 1879 and 1888 the College had produced 33 engineers and 68 passed subordinates. . . . an output which could have been secured at a much cheaper cost by sending these students to England at state expense. F.J.E. Spring of the P.W.D. pointed out that the chief difficulty of the College was that "it had been nobody's child. In so far as teaching was concerned it was under the Education Department, as far as manual work, under P.W.D.". The successive inquiries of this period seemed to have roused the College to new activity.<sup>80</sup> In 1889 it was made a residential institution. In 1891 the Government decision to reserve the Upper Subordinate grades of the P.W.D. to Engineering for which the qualification for admission was raised to First graduates of this institution had the effect of promoting the study of Arts degree instead of the Entrance Examination. Agricultural classes were opened in 1899 but closed in 1910. In 1894 the Survey Schools of Dacca (1876), Patna, and Cuttack were affiliated to Sibpur College in order to make it the pivot of the system of technical instruction of the province. The Educational Conference at Simla in 1901 recognised the valuable work done by the College but resolved that "the first call upon technical effort should lie in other directions". The Government Resolution (1904) recommended assistance in the form of scholarships to Europe and America. But the scheme turned out to be a failure as men thus trained found themselves in no happier predicament on their return to India. Failure to find a job or to start an independent enterprise at last compelled them to seek an opening in the administrative services<sup>81</sup>.

Agricultural education had been persistently neglected though a beginning had been made early in 1821 by William Carey with the Agri-Horticultural Society, warmly supported by Ramgopal Ghosh and others. The agrarian economy of the province wedded to customary empirical methods discouraged expensive scientific contrivances unless they were accompanied with drastic land reforms and vigorous state incentive. Agricultural education held out such forbidding prospect that the few Bengalis who received it in England towards the close of the century, were on their return driven to seek employment as Deputy Magistrates!<sup>82</sup> The Bengal Veterinary College was founded in 1893 and developed to the stature of a College in 1899. The Universities Commission 1902 rightly stressed the importance of agricultural science in a predominantly agricultural country like India. The confession of the failure of the existing system of agricultural instruction in the Resolution of 1804 had little effect in Bengal where no agricultural school existed. The higher Agricultural course that was opened at Sibpur College in 1899 was abandoned in 1901 and the lower course of two years fell in a moribund condition. The recommendation of the Government of India in its Despatch to the Secretary of State in 1905 for an agricultural college in each province remained a pious hope never realised.

Nor was technical education under more favourable auspices. In 1886 Lord Macdonell in his Memorandum on technical education in Bengal



described technical schools as mere excrescences with neither plan nor object. But the Government was chary of further extension of technical schools lest it should "aggravate the present difficulties by adding to the educated unemployed a new class of professional men for whom there is no commercial demand" (*Papers relating to Technical Education in India 1886-1904* p. 36). The years 1901 to 1904 were crowded with a series of inquiries opening with Sir E. Buck's inquiry on practical and technical education, the Simla Conference in 1901, the recommendations of the Committee on Industrial Schools in India and the Government Resolution of 1904. These resulted in a crop of literature that has been described as "voluminous, suggestive, but comparatively infructuous". The Government of Bengal contemplated a scheme of ten craft schools of which the Weaving School at Serampore was actually started in 1907.<sup>23</sup> A co-ordinated scheme of engineering and technical education in consonance with the industrial potentialities of the country was never formulated and this omission gave substance to the people's chronic complaint about the lukewarmness of the Government regarding technical advancement of the country.

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## BENGALI LITERATURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The creative response of the nineteenth century Bengal to the stimulus of Western thought and culture has often been compared to the Italian Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> The magical efflorescence of vernacular literature in myriad forms and glory and the appearance of a host of remarkable individuals in different walks of life within the short span of a century may give strength to this claim. But partly it is also due to a blind application of Burchhardt's interpretation of the Italian Renaissance to an altogether different phenomenon.

Jacob Burckhardt treated the civilization of the Renaissance as "a splendid flower that suddenly blooms in the middle of a desert" or "the phoenix rising from its ashes after five hundred years." He divorced the cultural development of Italy from its political, social and economic contexts and thus made possible the export of the concept to alien milieu. An analysis of fifteenth century individualism, it appealed to the individualist geist of the nineteenth century; a hymn to plastic arts had a seductive attraction for the aesthetes. The students of the nineteenth century Bengali culture became its prey and shut their eyes to the current of Renaissance studies, since the publication of Burckhardt's masterpiece over a century ago.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of the Renaissance can be a workable tool in the hands of the historians. But its total Burckhardtian transplantation in the Indian environment lacks justification and, when forced, confuses rather than enlightens. An Indian 'Modern Age' has been posed against the Indian 'Middle Ages', no less dark, dismal and barbarous (readily accepted by the Hindus because it was associated with the Moslem rule by the British historians). The rôle of the Greek and the Latin classics has been given not to the old Sanskrit literature but to the Western arts and sciences, taught through the medium of English. Other parallelisms like the birth of a secular ideal, an individualist and amoral urbanity and a spirit of enquiry, criticism and realism are not hard to trace (especially in a handful of towering personalities sampled). The spectacular growth of vernacular literature is put up as the trump card. The more eager (and innocent) souls have seen the Reformation in the Brahmo movement and the Counter-Reformation in the Hindu revival.

"I apprehend", wrote Canning to the Court of Directors in 1817, "nothing to be so little useful as reasoning by analogy from Europe to India." The scenes were so different. The social and economic matrices of the twelfth and the thirteenth century Italy, which contributed to the magnificence of the Quattrocento and the Cinquecento, were wholly wanting in the 19th century Bengal whose overwhelming agrarian economy was dented here and there by British capitalist activities, more commercial than industrial in nature. Calcutta, no doubt, dwarfed every thing in



the landscape, but it never had any productive life like Florence, nor a trading empire like Venice, which "held the gorgeous East in fee". It was hardly a century old while the others hailed back to the Roman times. Renaissance Italy was the grave of the Empire and the play ground of small well-knit, independent princely or republican states, while Bengal's (and India's) heteorogeneous anarchy was being brought under one centralised bureaucratic sway of a foreign power which left no scopes, like the Sforza-Milan or the Medici-Florence, for the development of unusual talents. The patrons and appreciators of the Italian Renaissance were bourgeoisie with firm roots in industry, commerce and high finance (though some of them had fallen on evil days during the 15th century depression), while those in India were the middle classes created by the Cornwallis settlement, trade and limited employment opportunities in the Company's courts and commissariat. The first source of income, land, was speculative; the second, commerce, was controlled by the Company (till 1833) and the private British capitalists and restricted more or less to a money lender's interest or a middle man's commission ; law was organised corruption rather than an independent and learned profession till 1862. There were not many doctors and engineers.<sup>3</sup> The number of Indians employed in various civil situations by the Government was 1,197 in 1828, 2,813 in 1849, 2,846 in 1857 and about 25,000 in 1901.<sup>4</sup> Banks did not provide much opportunity as there were only 15 in Bengal in 1901. The 'Big Five' managing agents of Calcutta could absorb some in clerical capacity. In an income-tax assessment table of 1891-92 Bengal, Chotanagpur, Orissa, Bhagalpur and Patna show only 103,176 assesseees (Bengal proper—70% of the total, Calcutta—21,902) with an average per capita demand of Rs. 28-8 as per year (Bengal—Rs. 32/, Calcutta—Rs. 82-11a-3p). The proportion of the assesseees to the total population was 1 in 853.<sup>5</sup> These people, half-urban and half rural (for many were dependent on income from land), were not a fit vessel to receive the Protean gift of the Renaissance. It is idle to seek for a Lorenzo Medici among the banians or a Federigo of Urbino among the zamindars.

It is time to note certain characteristics of the actual creators of the nineteenth century culture. Mostly they came from the educated middle classes and made money in government employ. Rammohun Roy acted as Dewan of English Collectors. Madhusudan Dutt had been Head Clerk and Interpreter to the Junior Police Magistrate of Calcutta before he left for England (1862) and became Examiner of the Privy Council Records at the High Court in 1870. Many prominent Derozians were appointed Deputy Collectors. Rajnarayan Basu was the headmaster of a government school and Bhudev Mukherjee, an inspector. Vidyasagar retired as Principal of the Sanskrit College, Calcutta. Rangalal Banerjee, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Nabin Chandra Sen were Deputy Magistrates. Dinabandhu Mitra rose to be the assistant to the Post Master General of Bengal. Even Hem Chandra Banerjee acted as a Munsif for a year. Ramesh Chandra Dutt belonged to the 'heaven born' Indian Civil Service.



Debendranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore enjoyed independent means, the source of which, however, was zamindari property bought with perquisites of office by Dwarkanath Tagore. Keshab Chandra Sen's grandfather, Ramkomul Sen, was the Khazanchee of the Bank of Bengal. The highest economic enterprise open to them was investment in land and public debt. Cut off from all creative political and economic expression (which the Italians of the Renaissance enjoyed), they expressed themselves in religious and social reforms and in literary activities.

All of them had either a formal Western education in English medium or, like Rammohun and Rabindranath, taught themselves—no less well. Hailing from one great centre of Western education, the Hindu College of Calcutta, most of them developed certain tastes and affiliations which kept them firmly anchored to a particular cultural ideal. That ideal was neither Ciceronian *humanitas*, which inspired Petrarch, nor classical Greek, which inspired the fifteenth and the sixteenth century humanists. It was the culture of the Hanoverian and Victorian England—rational and empirical, egalitarian and romantic, utilitarian and positivist, with a touch of Elizabethan glory wafted across the seas on the viewless wings of Shakespeare's poesy.<sup>6</sup> Bengal went to school not at Athens of Pericles nor at Rome of Augustus but at England of Shakespeare, Milton and Byron,<sup>7</sup> Bacon, Locke and Bentham, Gibbon, Hume and Macaulay, Burke, Spencer and Mill. There were two remarkable exceptions. Rammohun taught himself Hebrew, Greek and Latin to read the Bible in the original, partly to slake his spiritual thirst and partly to seek weapons for his theological battle. Madhusudan drank deep at the Phrygian spring and rubbed shoulders with the shades of Homer, Virgil, Dante and Petrarch, to be a poet. He alone imported new forms, ideas and images from the classical world and tried to write, "as a Greek would have done." Others looked to "Albion's distant shore", not to "the isles of Greece".

*Imitatio* of England, yes, but not of England only. The best minds of the nineteenth century were catholic enough to imbibe the legacy of ancient India, enshrined in Sanskrit. They took pains to learn it, where, like Vidyasagar and Bhudev, they were not born to the tradition. Even Madhusudan, temperamentally the most European of them, did not exclude it from his heavy reading list.<sup>8</sup> Rammohun commenced his literary activities with the *Vedantagrantha* (1815) and translations from the Upanishads (1816-19) and mastered Smriti, Nyaya and Tantra. Madhu was familiar with Valmiki and Vyasa. Vidyasagar recreated Bhababhuti and Kalidasa. Debendranath and Rajnarayan made a special study of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Bankimchandra's *Krishnacharita* and *Dharma-tattva* show his acquaintance as much with the Hindu shastras as with Benthamism and positivism. He turned especially to the *Bhagavata* and the *Gita*.<sup>9</sup> Rabindranath extended his province from the ancient to the medieval Indian culture. At thirteen he was reading Kalidasa and Vidyapati (along with Macbeth). One of his earliest writings, *Prachin Sahitya*, stands unrivalled as the most sensitive appreciation of Kalidasa



and Banabhatta. His poems draw direct inspiration and imagery from the Upanishads. One perceptive contributor to *Rabindranath Tagore, A Centenary Volume 1861-1961* observes, "Sanskrit and Pali literature and Indian Philosophy were greater formative influence on the writings of Tagore than Western literature and thought. Western influence is just a tributary (though a fine one at that) which joins in on the way."<sup>10</sup>

Our nineteenth century cultural harvest was mainly literary. It was raised on Indian soil with a cross-breed of English and Indian seeds. This explains some of its strength and weakness. It excelled in certain prose forms—religious discourse, novel, short story and satire—but not in drama.<sup>11</sup> It experimented successfully in epic and romantic lyric but it paid no heed, like its English counterpart, to the symbolist movement in French literature. It left European music untouched except in the dilettante circle of the versatile Tagores. Though it produced good antiquarians (like Rajendralal Mitra) and politicians (like Surendranath and Bipin Pal), it was sterile in historical and political literature of abiding value. How could a Machiavelli flourish without a Borgia Papacy or a Locke without a Glorious Revolution? It did not produce an autobiography comparable to Benevenuto Cellini's which would be no mere introspection but the vivid and vital description of the whole man. It did not put forth any scientific literature of worth as there was no thrill of discovery in the air nor any technical challenge to be met. There was no development in architecture or the plastic arts as there was no incentive to curve statues for a Medici Chapel, to design the dome of a St. Peter's or to paint the portraits of a Gioconda.

Lastly, it witnessed the revival of *Dharma* in the ancient sense of an ethical way of life and an intense awareness of God. Did not the same sophisticated poet (Madhusudan) weep for Radha's *biraha* after his Miltonic flight? the same moralist (Bankim) unfold the tender beginning, the wild abandon and the bitter disillusionment of romantic passion, to preach in the end the glory of sublimation? the same humanist (Tagore), whose short stories never missed the simplest joy and misery of the lowly and whose poems caught the most fleeting moods of love, compose his songs on the mystic yearning of man for God and God for man? Here in lies the most marked difference between the Italian Renaissance and our nineteenth century cultural efflorescence. In the former the ferment of new life exploded the accepted code of morality and men reverted to nature and the free play of instinct and experience. In the latter a new code of morality was fashioned and the claim of society set up against the liberated individual. Where the Italian Renaissance preserved its triumphs in art, the nineteenth century Bengal preserved its triumphs in its spiritual story from Rammohun to Rabindranath. In Italy artistic glory was accompanied by moral misery and social disintegration. In Bengal the artistic glory was one-sided and limited but the moral victory was unmistakable and, instead of political and social disruption, we find the beginning of a new integration after an initial set back in the first phase of Westernisation.



The intense pre-occupation of the age with *Upanishads* and the *Gita* has a historical significance. It expressed a seminal aspect of the *Zeitgeist*. "Every revival of idealism in India has traced its ancestry to the teaching of Upanishads".<sup>12</sup> They were the perennial spring from which the Indians drew vitality for a new life. The Brahmos (and many intellectuals who were not officially members of the Samaj) turned to them with the same purpose as the European humanists turned to the Greek classics i.e. for a model of Virtue—not for the mere negation of the medieval values but for the positive assertion of a purer, fuller and more human *maniera* of life and thought. Rammohun translated five principal Upanishads, *Kena*, *Ishā*, *Katha*, *Mundakā* and *Māndukya*, and wrote a commentary on *Brahmasutra* (*Vedāntagrantha*) between 1815-1819,<sup>13</sup> for in them lay what he called সত্যধর্ম or the true religion. By this he meant the clearest declaration of the unity and omnipresence of God and the most relentless indictment of idolatry and ritualism. "I, therefore, with a view to making them (Indians) happy and comfortable both here and after.....translated their most revered theological work..... in order to convince them that the unity of God, and absurdity of idolatry, are evidently pointed out by their own scriptures"<sup>14</sup>. He was a universal theist but his theism was firmly rooted in the *advaitabada* of Sankara, so far as the concepts of *nirguna Brāhman*, unity of *Brahman* and *Jiva*, nature of *moksha* and the relative irrelevance of *karmakanda* were concerned. In two things, however, he differed from Sankara's *advaita*. Sankara considered worship to be much inferior to জ্ঞানমার্গ, which alone, by dissipating *avidyā* and destroying the sense of dualism, brought *moksha*. He also laid stress on অবিকারীভেদ and সম্বাস. Rammohun, on the contrary, gave worship a primary importance, defined it as জ্ঞানের আবৃত্তি and stressed recitation of the glories of God through readings of the Scriptures, sermons and hymns. It is quite clear that his form of worship was not based on pure knowledge where man meditates alone on his oneness with God. It had an element of devotionism as well. This জ্ঞানপ্রতিষ্ঠাভক্তি or devotion based on knowledge, says a modern authority on Rammohun, was not derived from traditional ভক্তিবাদ but from a branch of *Tantra* which was based on Vedantic monism and which had a further appeal to Rammohun for its bold acceptance of the material world and man's mundane existence *contra* the ascetically inclined Sankara's commentary. From Christian unitarianism he only took the form of congregational worship, while its spirit he took from the *Vedanta*, mellowed and liberalised by *Tantra*.<sup>15</sup> In Debendranath Tagore the element of *bhakti* was further nourished by Sufi mysticism. He rejected the revelatory character of the Vedas and the Vedanta and repudiated Sankara's monistic commentary on the Upanishads for one of his own.<sup>16</sup> His writings, sermons and letters bristle with the images of a personal God as Father, Friend and Dispenser<sup>17</sup>. "We were opposed to idolatry. By worshipping Him I obtain Him as the result." "According to the Brahmo Dharma, God is the



creator, not the substance of the Universe". He went so far as to say, "The Brahmo Samaj must be saved from three dangers (bighna): first, idolatry; second, Christianity; third, Vedantism". Keshabchandra went in for even a broader philosophical standpoint which was akin to the commentaries of Ramanuja, Madhva and Nimbārka. Personally he fell under the spell of Jesus (whom Pratap Majumdar called "Oriental Jesus"), Chaitanya and Ramkrishna, by turn.

In the *Upanishads* many of the 19th century intellectuals found the basis of a universal, humane, socio-centric idealism; peace and freedom from a deep anxiety, born of the confrontation with the West and with Christianity; a rediscovery of the identity of the individual with the cosmic process (which helped nationalism); a new realism where the phenomenal world was rooted in the ground-reality of an all comprehensive *Brahman*. Maya no longer cast a veil of illusion on the world but implied the inexplicable relation between God and the world (অনির্বচনীয়ত্ব). At once there burst a new joy in the variety, beauty and dynamism of life, which were the manifestations of the one Absolute. যদিও কিঞ্চিৎ অগংপ্রাণ একত্ব নিঃসৃতম্। From the one source all life have emerged. যথা সদীপ্তাং পাবকান্বিতফুলিঙ্গাঃ। They are like the sparks of the same fire. There could not be any higher spiritual basis for brotherhood of men irrespective of all distinctions and any profounder inspiration for social reformism.

*Brahman*, to the followers of Rammohun, meant growth and suggested progress. This living unity of essence and existence, of the ideal and the real, of knowledge and power, inspired them to dedicate themselves to the service of their fellow-men, who were God's creatures and bore the image of their Creator. They strove strenuously to transcend ego, to live, think and act in His eternal presence and to please Him through service which was part of worship and not through the soulless externalia of religion. They did not regard সংসার as a dragging chain of evil but as a supreme spiritual challenge. Absolute good was not in finite pleasure (ভূমৈব স্বধম্ নাহ্নে স্বধমন্তি), personal ends were to be subordinated to social ends (তেনত্যক্তেন ভূকীথাঃ), তপস্ was not austerity alone but non-attached work for the community, whereby one sacrificed one's ego. The world was not to be renounced but to be redeemed for God. To the Raja God was Truth and Knowledge—সত্যম্ জ্ঞানমনস্তম্. Debendranath made Him a little more personal—He was also শান্তম্ and শিবম্, peace and goodness; প্রাণারামম্ and মনোজানন্দম্ (Taittiriya 1/6/2), a joy to the soul and a bliss to the mind. With awe Rammohun saw in creation the manifestation of God's illimitable majesty, knowledge and power; Debendranath saw His goodness and joy as well, which wore the face of beauty: আনন্দরূপমমৃতম্ যদ্বিতীতি।

For an idealist view other Indian intellectuals, mainly Hindu, turned to the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the *Bhagavata*. Bankimchandra was the protagonist of this school of thought. In fashioning his অহীলনর্থ



Bankim was more indebted to the *Mahabharata* (including the *Gita*) and the *Bhagavata* (to a lesser extent) than to Comte though he quoted that positivist philosopher with avidity in different places of *Dharmatattva* (especially, app. *kha*). He felt the need for a correct exposition of the fundamentals of Hinduism in the context of misinterpretations by the traditionalists and one-sided interpretation by the Brahmos<sup>18</sup>. The core of Hinduism, according to Bankim, was চিত্তশুদ্ধি or purity of mind and soul: “সাকারের উপাসনা বা নিরাকারের উপাসনা, একেশ্বরবাদ বা বহুদেবে ভক্তি, বৈতবাদ বা অবৈতবাদ, জ্ঞানবাদ, কর্মবাদ বা ভক্তিবাদ, সকলই ইহার নিকট অকিঞ্চিৎকর।... চিত্তশুদ্ধিই ধর্ম। তবে প্রধানতঃ হিন্দুধর্মেই ইহা প্রবল।”

Without this purity of mind and soul rituals had no meaning and worship of images was blasphemy. How did this purity arise? From the full development, fulfilment and integration of all human faculties: “এই চিত্তশুদ্ধি মহুচ্ছাদিগের সকল বৃত্তিগুলির সম্যক্ স্ফুর্তি, পরিণতি ও সামঞ্জস্যের ফল।” And what were its signs? Peace of mind, love for fellowmen and devotion to God: “অতএব চিত্তশুদ্ধির স্থূল লক্ষণ ঐশ্বরে ভক্তি, মহুচ্ছো প্রীতি এবং হৃদয়ে শান্তি।”

Could Upanishadic mono-theism lead to it? Bankim regarded Upanishadic mono-theism as the fourth and highest stage in the evolution of Vedic religion but still incomplete: “এই ধর্ম অতি বিস্তৃত, কিন্তু অসম্পূর্ণ।”

The final touch was given by *Bhaktishastras* like the *Gita*. শেষে গীতাদি ভক্তিশাস্ত্রের আবির্ভাবে এই সচ্চিদানন্দের উপাসনার সঙ্গে ভক্তি মিলিতা হইল। তখন হিন্দুধর্ম সম্পূর্ণ হইল। ইহাই সর্বাদ্যসম্পূর্ণ ধর্ম এবং ধর্মের মধ্যে জগতে শ্রেষ্ঠ। নিগুণ ব্রহ্মের স্বরূপজ্ঞান এবং সগুণ ঐশ্বরের ভক্তিবৃত্ত উপাসনা ইহাই বিস্তৃত হিন্দুধর্ম।<sup>19</sup>

The early Brahmos were wrong to consider religious evolution complete with the contemplation of the *Nirguna* and *Nirakara Brahman*. To it had to be added the worship of a *Saguna Isvara* who by His omnipotence might manifest Himself in finitude. Similarly the Hindus were wrong to think of gods other than *Isvara*. He reiterated the incompleteness of the Brahmo concept in his review of Rajnarayan's হিন্দুধর্মের শ্রেষ্ঠতা and called it a modern innovation without parallel in any stage of Indian history. Human mind, in fact, could not conceive Sankara's *Brahman*—free from all predicates and attributes—because of conditions which bound all human knowledge. Thought, as Hegel had said, can only work with determinate realities. The Absolute can never become an object of knowledge, for what is known is finite and relative. Only a manifested God could be ideal and, once we believed in divine grace, we could also accept God's human manifestation in the life of Srikrishna.

Still Srikrishna of Bankim was not the Puranic miracle-making *Avatar*. An *Avatar* is a descent of God into man and not as ascent of man into Godhead which was the goal of Bankimchandra's religion. He developed the hint in the *Gita* of the eternal God in man and, by making him pass through the strenuous discipline of অহুশীলন, arrived at the superman or man—God, i.e. Srikrishna. Srikrishna was a historic personage and yet the embodiment of what Bankim told us above as the core of Hinduism—“চিত্তশুদ্ধি”<sup>20</sup>.



Srikrishna acquired it by establishing a perfect harmony and integration of all his faculties—physical, intellectual, spiritual and creative—and then dedicated his complete (সিদ্ধ) personality to লোকহিত out of দয়া and প্রীতিবৃত্তি i.e. compassion and love. He was not the ascetic Christian or the non-violent Buddhist (or the sin-obsessed Brahmo, Bankim might have added). He had not destroyed but transfigured the tension of human life. He belonged to the world, knew its crooked ways, took up the challenge of evil and oppression and fought a crusade to crush them, but all the time remained non-attached and uninvolved in the fray. He was the ideal of all—domestic and recluses, soldiers and strategists, missionaries and empire-builders. He was *l'uomo universale*, whom a degenerate India had forgotten for a life of ignorance and imbecility. The idealism that could bring forth such a fullness in man and gear it to the goal of political and moral regeneration of India, would be the most universal (reaching all strata of people prepared by tradition to accept him as God), the most human (for it did full justice to all human faculties without any unnatural partiality to any), the most useful (for it was more materialistic than Upanishadic mono-theism), and most practicable (as a closely defined discipline would not allow it to lapse into abstractions). What would be its utilitarian goal? Not social reformism, which was the watch-word of the mono-theists, but a religious and moral regeneration, which itself would bring spontaneous reform in society without doing violence to normal historical evolution. It is clear also that Bankim never accepted the popular view of Hinduism. Otherwise he would not have felt it necessary to fashion a new view Hinduism (though he attributed it to Srikrishna). He was aware of the unscientific character of image-worship and afraid that it would hamper realisation of truth by confining man's mind within a narrow orbit. But he stressed its aesthetic aspect which the Brahmos missed : “সাকারপূজা কাব্য এবং স্থলশিল্পের অত্যন্ত পুষ্টিকারক”<sup>21</sup>. He would not condemn a worship that had inspired the Vaishnava lyrics. On the whole he preferred to keep out of the সাকার-নিরাকার controversy to lay stress on the fundamentals of religion.

On the face of it these two streams of idealism seem poles apart. The former (Upanishadic) was more abstract and impersonal, the latter (based on the *Mahabharata* and the *Gita*), more concrete and personal; the former was more ethical, the latter more expedient, the former emphasized knowledge, the latter devotion; the former was more universal, the latter more national, even more sectarian; the former was reformist and evolutionary, the latter revolutionary, never discarding violence for ধর্মযুদ্ধ (fighting evil); the former was drawing strength from the mercy of God, the latter, relying more on the perfectibility of man.

On a deeper analysis, however, certain affinities, imposed by environment, emerge. Both were seeking for an ideal which would energize an enervated people to make a concerted effort towards common good. While Rammohun translated the Upanishads for লোকশ্রেয়ঃ—“with a view to making



people happy and comfortable" (a Benthamite slogan though also following from the oneness of God), Bankim was talking of লোকহিত, মহত্ত্ব প্রীতি (apparently another Benthamite or Comtesque credo though highly surcharged with the idea of the liberated man of *Gita*— চিকীর্ষলোকসংগ্রহম্ *Gita*, III, 25). Who would forget the lyrical ending of the first letter of Kamalakanta, where Bankim equates God with প্রীতি or the summing up of the sixth chapter of *Krishnacharitra*, where he equates religion with লোকের হিত? However derived, from Locke or Bentham, Comte or Spencer, Upanishad or *Gita*, they spoke the language of the 19th century. Secondly, both streams of thought are intellectual reconstructions, adapted to meet the needs of different but complementary audiences. Rammohun adapted Sankara's *advaita* to popularise the religion of the Upanishads while Bankim resurrected, almost recreated, the personality of Srikrishna to intellectualise the Hinduism of the latter day. Rammohun introduced, however slightly, the element of *bhakti* in the Brahmo worship, for, without it, the arid religion of the ascetic would never attract the masses. Debendranath rejected নিষ্ঠা, though retaining নিরাকার. Keshab even went further in personalizing God. Bankim, on the other hand, was out to capture the Hindu intellectual before he embraced Christianity, Brahmoism or atheism. Hence he emphasized জ্ঞান again and again (did not the *Gita* itself proclaim superiority of জ্ঞানযজ্ঞ to দ্রব্যময় যজ্ঞ?) and treated even the *Bhagavata Purana* as less reliable than the *Gita* and rejected Chaitanya cult (plus Jayadeva) for its surfeit of *bhakti*. When he called Krishna আত্মারাম at the end of *Krishnacharitra* and quoted from the *Chandogya Upanishad* on আত্মরতি he was not very far from the mellowed monotheists. Thirdly, both lay stress on the development of character and there is a close similarity between their ethical codes. Though Rammohun's followers turned more and more to determinism and grace, he himself believed in freedom of choice and need of constant exertion (Karma) for the spiritual development of man. Bankim's Srikrishna is the very embodiment of exertion. In fact, both the streams of idealism yearned after an equivalence with God (স্বাধর্ম্য) and not after an identity (সাম্যত্ব). To Rammohun and Debendranath we are the children of God (পিতানোহসি) and have to be fit for His heritage. To Bankim we are Arjunas, perplexed by the ebb and flow of সংসার, enervated by indecision and doubt and emasculated by unharmonious development of personality. Both are committed to perpetual endeavour and non-attached action for fulfilment of man's divine destiny. Since in Bankim's vision this destiny included political freedom (while it did not acquire an immediate urge in Rammohun's day) Srikrishna's image as পার্থসারথি has been so deeply drawn and his statesman-like qualities are so largely stressed. This difference is an accident of history and should not blind us to the common stress on কর্ম. Fourthly, both imply a boundless hope in man and an abiding faith in progress through intellectual, moral and spiritual regeneration. Both are humanists *par excellence*. If God



is so great, why can't His children be great as well? If Srikrishna—a human being, albeit extraordinary—could perform such a prodigious perfection, why could not we, also men like him, and bearing the divine spark in us? We could, provided we tried enough and on all levels of being. Bankim made Prafulla try it. Fifthly, both pointed to a glorious future based on India's glorious past and thus strengthened the nationalist sentiments of the century. Lastly, both contributed to freedom of religious thought (and freedom of thought in general) by making correct texts and daring critiques thereof available in vernacular tongue. Religious dissent contributed in no small way to political dissent.

The discussion may be terminated by a pointer to a few dangers latent in both. First, a danger of confusion and misunderstanding. Ram-mohun's ideas were rejected by many as eclecticism, inspired by comparative theology, and the orthodox Hindu spied in it a double taint of Islam and (Unitarian) Christianity. His liberal-humanist and happy faith was itself darkened by the latter-day Brahmo's obsession with sin and exhibitionist *bhakti* till Rabindranath transfigured it with a view of *Brahman* as *ব্রহ্ম* and *অনিন্দ*, who is not merely the father and the lord but the lover, the bridegroom of the soul, whose *lila* would not have been complete without the finite<sup>22</sup>. Similarly Bankim's views were abused by the champions of Hindu revival, which caused a reaction among the rationalists and the reformists, till Vivekananda partially redeemed, only to deepen suspicion about their uncompromising Hindu character. Secondly, both brands of idealism were far too intellectual for the general mass of people who were bewildered by controversy among the Brahmos themselves and repelled by the rigour of Bankim's thought. They felt more at home in the allegorical pot-pourri interpretation of Hindu religion by the revivalist (that D. L. Roy indicted as 'Sasadhar, Huxley and goose'). Lastly, both were bound to be challenged by history and science as *a priori* constructions, produced not so much by objective factors of growth as by desire for a better world and coloured by wide readings in the Eastern and Western religious literature. Historians would question subjective selection of evidence; scientists, their empirical validity; philosophers, their logical consistency and sociologists, their universal applicability in a multi-racial country, fragmented into numberless sects and levels of culture.

The nineteenth century achievement was the recovery of the Old World as much as the discovery of the New, but all in the domain of intellect. The old world was the ideal of life revealed by Sanskrit scholarship (both Western and Indian); the new was the ideal of life evoked by the English literature of a particular period (if we except Shakespeare and Milton, who are ageless). But the recovery as well as the discovery took place in a sort of hot house atmosphere, since realisation of either in actual life was impossible. To the extent neither was complete nor normal. As Tagore aptly puts it, "I remember, when I look back, that we did not receive as much nourishment from the English literature as intoxication." The sudden eruption of such extravagant impul-



siveness and uncontrolled impetuosity created an unprecedented stir in the Bengali society. "The day of the first awakening was not one of restraint but of excitement." But so far as the extravagance of English literature was concerned it had roots in a concrete historical situation. "The roar of the tempest was heard because there was an actual tempest on". Here, in Bengal, the intellectuals imitated the voice of the 'tempest' though there was no more than the breath of a gentle wind. Secondly, the West began to repel by its impersonal efficiency and mechanical values, by its association with a bureaucratic government, an exploiting economy and an arrogant religion. While the English literature promised a richer, freer and more colourful life, the English rule denied them. By way of reaction many sought solace and shelter in their own past, as if in the mother's womb, and in that process clothed it with an utopian aura that was never on land or sea. Thus arose a paradoxical situation. The West deluded them and the East eluded them. Janus like, they looked forward to the modern West and backward to ancient India. They swung like a pendulum between Westernization and traditionalism and the intermediate stages of mixtures of both. This crisis of the nineteenth century conscience found expression in the Bengali literature—in its many *tours de force* and false notes, in its exuberant ecstasy alternating with deep despondency. The first fine careless rapture trailed into introspection, even to self-pity. The daring wings of Icarus dropped in the mid-sky. By the eighties the shadows had begun to lengthen. But still the light from the West hung rainbow like on the horizon, adding a new dimension of colour to the Bengali landscape.

It was a bliss to be alive in that dawn of 1815 when Rammohun Roy came to settle permanently at Calcutta. A synthesis of Bentham and the Vedanta seemed, then, not only desirable but possible. The Raja was no ascetic. He lived like a moslem grandee by day and an English lord by night. He gave his blessings to whatever beneficial or useful going on around him—the foundation of the Hindu College,<sup>23</sup> the defence of freedom of the press, the introduction of the jury system and the abolition of the Suttee. He welcomed British skill and capital for the development of the Indian economy and introduction of the Western science for modernising it. He was involved in the active life to the hilt. Yet he also knew the rewards of an inward withdrawal from it, where, with 'charity towards all and malice towards none', he might hold communion with the one Absolute, the Author and Preserver of the Universe, the intricate mechanism of which, more wonderful than that of a clock, was His temporal manifestation. (How do all this echo Descartes and the Deists!) A re-born spiritual awareness and the moral values which it entailed (and full credit goes to Christianity for acting as mid-wife) dominated Rammohun's literary efforts. It was not a formal conformity with the antiquity but a functional continuity. To Rammohun the antiquity was not a form to adore. He was seeking in it a moral guide which, like Virgil's shade in *Divina Commedia*, would lead him to a fuller, freer and



a more rational and dignified life. Its primary source was to be Sanskrit—not the spurious and interpolated version of the half-baked *pundits* but the authentic original obtained through the application of higher criticism. Its exposition was to be bilingual, for, though often his English friends had to be addressed or his Trinitarian opponents admonished, the audience he had chiefly in view was his fellow countrymen who knew neither the classical nor the English tongue. As he meant it for the masses, he made conscious efforts to make it simple and give it an even flow.

This was a new departure. Bharatchandra breathed rhetoric through every line of his polished, courtly and erotic poems. His *Annadāmangal* only paid lip-service to the medieval tradition of devotional poetry. Mukundaram had brought gods down from their Olympian heights, Bharatchandra dared to make fun of them. He was too much of a man of the world to believe in the mystery of godhead. He had lost the simple, somewhat naive, faith of his predecessors in divine powers. He had shed their irrational fear of gods' (and goddesses') cruel whims. Writing in an age of chaos Bharat had no values and he hid this tragic loss under the fireworks of wit, scholarship and ambiguity. His heirs lacked his mastery of words (drawn by an acutely sensitive ear from Sanskrit, Persian and Hindi), careful craftsmanship and sophisticated urbanity. They played infinite variations on his two major themes—devotion and love—till every imagery had lost its freshness and every mood its appeal. Poetry became sickeningly sentimental and concealed its lack of vitality under the baroque drapery of alliteration.<sup>24</sup>

The new-born Bengali prose had its limitations, too. It would not forsake the smell of the Fort William College class rooms and the walls of the Baptist Missions. As text books they imparted knowledge<sup>25</sup> or provided *ersatz* entertainment from Sanskrit, Persian or English fables.<sup>26</sup> Carey's *Dialogues* (1801) was a praiseworthy attempt to catch the *patois*. But they were the first halting steps of a child. The authors were not sure of their styles. Ramram Basu's *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra* (1801) was over-Persianised but he was learning in *Lipimala* (1802) to make the best use of popular language. Mrityunjoy showed a decided preference for Sanskritised style at first. His *Rajabali* (1808), however, is not so pedantic and stiff and parts of his *Prabodh Chandrika* (composed in 1813, published in 1833) vie with Carey's *Dialogues* in colloquialism. In others we find a desire to make the language clear and useful, to achieve a naturalness, but little more. Carey was, no doubt, the first to realise the possibilities of Bengali as one of the most expressive and eloquent languages of the East and by his own exertions or those of others, which he instigated or superintended, he left not only the students of the language well-provided with elementary books but with a standard of composition too. Yet in his and his compatriots' works, scientific knowledge of the objective world, elevated preoccupation with social, moral and metaphysical problems and spiritual yearning of the human soul were



wanting. Rammohun's prose, through halting and archaic and much too argumentative, supplied just these.

Literature became a vehicle of high debate on rational lines in his hands from the very beginning. The way he argued for a *nirākāra Brahman* in the preface of *Vedāntagrantha* (1815) or in *Bhattacharyer Sahit Vichar* (1816-17) and *Goswami Sahit Vichar* (1818) betray the skill of a fine dialectician apart from the conviction of a seer. For authority he would recognise (a) Sruti, (b) Vedānta Sutra, (c) deduction from observed facts and (d) hypothesis based on empirical observation. He would compile a scientific interpretation of the texts with the help of *Kosha*, *Vyābhāra* and *Prakarana* i.e. linguistic analysis. He would relegate Purana and Itihāsa to secondary importance as evidence as they had no authoritative editions or universally accepted commentaries. In *Sahamāraṇa Viśaya Prabartak O Nibartak Sambad* (1818-19) he showed mastery of higher criticism in proving *Manu* to be more reliable than *Angira* and other Smritis. In his debates with the Christian missionaries he exhibited a knowledge of Cartesian thought and a preference for Newtonian empiricism, besides familiarity with Indian logic.

But it was not logic alone which enlivened his writings. It was his broad, tolerant, humane approach to religion which saw similarities in Theism all over the world but allowed it to assume a native shape and colour provided it was freed from native prejudice and parochialism.<sup>27</sup> He seldom wielded the weapon of ridicule but could do so with good effect: “আমি আশ্চর্যজনক করি যে ঈশ্বরের কপোতরূপ গ্রহণ করা আপনি স্বীকার করিয়াও বিরূপে হিন্দুকে উপহাস করেন যে পৌরাণিক হিন্দুরা স্বীকার করেন যে ঈশ্বর মৎস্ত ও গরুড় বেশ ধারণ করিয়া দৃষ্টিগোচর হইয়াছেন। কি মৎস্ত কপোতের তায় নিরীহ নহে, কি গরুড় পায়রা হইতে অধিক প্রয়োজনে আইসে না।”

At the beginning he used archaisms like তেঁহো, জেঁহা, হইলেন, এমন, যদি কহ, জানহ and knew no punctuation except the stop. His sentences were long and clauses involved. But we see him pick up a more facile and a more crisp style as he goes on. The clauses of *Sahamāraṇa Viśaya Prabartak O Nibartak Sambad* are short. Punctuation has appeared. In *Chāri-prasner Uttar* and *Pathyapradān* he writes with an even flow. At the end the amateur has learnt enough to attempt *Gauriya Vyākaran* (1833), a grammar of the Bengali language.

It is difficult to agree with S. K. De's conclusion that, “compared with that of earlier and contemporary writers, his argumentative prose is hardly attractive; it is stiff, pedantic and devoid of all literary grace”. He cants at its abstraction and scholasticism, its harsh, unrhythmical diction. He would give the palm to Carey, Mrityunjay and Tarinicharan and trace their continuity in Vidyasagar, Pyarichand and Bankimchandra. But Carey's *patois* and Tarinicharan's apparent ease, which really followed from the subject matter he handled, viz fable, could never form the base of Bengali prose on which Vidyasagar or Bankim could build.



Mrityunjay has a much better claim but he lacks the sustained high tone of Rammohun as also the muscular elasticity necessary for exposition of a flexible and rational thought process. As for ornateness and pedantry he could easily beat Rammohun at his worst. There can not be any poetry less bare than Rammohun's songs and yet, as Ramgati Nyayaratna says, they possess "the power of melting even stony hearts". Nobody would call them good poetry but, in contrast to the cheap jingle and vacuous imagery of the later Kabi songs, they evoke the pathos of a lonely pilgrim of spirit.

It came neither from the Derozians nor from the orthodox opponents of Rammohun. A group of young intellectuals, drinking scientific scepticism, Deism and revolutionary radicalism, distilled by a gifted teacher, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, at the Hindu College (1826-31), the Derozians lacked roots in their own culture, which alone could furnish the creative sap. Adrift on a sea of novel ideas, they heard the siren song of the West and, bereft of the sober integrity of Rammohun, set their sails to a hidden rock. The discrepancy between the world they lived in and the world evoked by Derozio's exposition of Bacon, Hume and Tom Paine proved unbearable to these angry youngmen of the nineteenth century. They mistook the West's externalia for the West's fundamentals and equated its culture with its religion. They ate beef, swilled wine and defied cherished conventions of the Hindu society with a swagger—they were "wading to liberalism through tumblers of beer". Much of it was adolescent exhibitionism, some of it was bewildered reaction of intellectual aliens caught between two cultures, but we see also a pathetic attempt to create a suitable ritual for the new cult of the West. "Knowledge is power" was their motto and they pursued it with unflagging zeal in journals like *Parthenon*, *Jñānānvesan* and *Bengal Spectator*, and at the meetings of the Academic Association and the Epistolary Association. No problems, not even that of the existence of God, was beyond their enquiring ken, no "idol" too sacred to be demolished, and they brought to bear on them a highly critical, free and lively mind. For a short decade K. M. Banerjee, Ramgopal Ghosh, Radhanath Sikdar, Tarachand Chakravorty and Peary Chand Mitra stirred the intellectual atmosphere with daring discourses on the Permanent Settlement, the Company's Charter, freedom of the press, the state system of education, Black Bills, native rights and private property. Many of them rejected Rammohun's theism but continued his Benthamite enquiry into society, law and government.

Anger cannot create when it turns to petulance. More heat than light was born of their arguments, and without a literary expression in the vernacular tongue (all of them were fervent Anglicists), the spirit of the movement appeared to be as alien and eccentric as its exponents.

The orthodox reaction to Rammohun had little significance for literature. Its leader, Radhakanta Deb, took his stand against deism, Christianity, atheism and social reformism alike. But he never wrote anything except one or two text books. Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay,



editor of *Samāchār Chandrika*, a reply to Rammohun's *Sambād Kaumudī*, wrote two biting satires on the *babus* and *the banians*-*Kalikātā Kamālā-laya* and *Nababābubilās*. The orthodox reaction was unproductive, first, because it was anachronistic and secondly, like the anglicism of the Derozians, its orthodoxy was an exaggerated posture, in this case born of fear of loss of social and cultural leadership, which the irreverent younger generation had challenged.

The force unleashed by Derozio found its creative expression in Madhusudan Dutt. The leading poet of Madhusudan's day was Iswar Chandra Gupta. More a gifted journalist than a poet, deeply conscious of the trends of his times, Iswar Chandra was, however, out of tune with many of them and his lack of direct contact with Western culture sterilised his obvious mastery of the traditional rhyme-scheme. His affinity lay with the *Kabiwalas* whose lives and extant songs he collected with assiduous care for the *Sambād Prabhākar* (of 1 Sravan and 1 Bhadra, 1260 B.S.). Bankimchandra paid his debt of gratitude to Iswar Chandra Gupta in very high terms<sup>28</sup> but even he, once an admiring apprentice, could not admit the master as 'a poet'. "মহুদুদয়ের কোমল, গম্ভীর, উন্নত অক্ষুট ভাবগুলি ধরিয়া তাহাকে গঠন দিয়া, অব্যক্তকে তিনি ব্যক্ত করিতে জানিতেন না। সৌন্দর্য সৃষ্টিতে তিনি তাদৃশ পটু ছিলেন না।"

He was a poet of the concrete and objective world of facts, of the earth, earthy, delighting in or raving at what he saw with his eyes and never troubling his practical mind with dreams and distant visions. A naturalist by instinct, he was a satirist by the influence of environment. The weft and web of the East and the West and the ridiculous compromises between home and abroad, which life enforced, supplied him with an inexhaustible source of mirth and merciless fun, which spared none. The fake *sahib* and *memsahib*, the planter and the missionary were his special targets, but the fake pundits (নস্তু লোলা দধি চোলা) were not left out. Part of his wrath can be explained by his miserable youth and his hard-won success in a society of upstarts with little sense of values. His vulgarity, obtrusive at times, was not a personal delinquency but a social phenomenon; it was a vulgarity of taste, not of mind. This can be easily proved by the sincere tone of devotion in his religious poetry, which forms the largest part of his corpus. Here he takes on, after Rammohun, a non-sectarian attitude; the relations between him and his God are those between a son and a father. His patriotism was angular. He would embrace a native dog rather than a foreign god but appeal to the English to save Bengal from the Mutiny. His political views were mixed. The poet who made fun of the বিবিজান and বিড়ালাকী বিধুমুখী gave his firm support to female education.

To Madhusudan, however, it was all *journalese* in vulgar taste and Billingsgate language, in inflexible metre and insufferable rhetorical device. Iswar Gupta's devotion (and anti-missionary tirades, which were



one aspect of his love for Hinduism) seemed to be reactionary, his patriotism—parochial, his anti-Western fulminations—the bias of an ignorant rustic and his poetic form—a blind repetition of the worst medieval tradition, unleavened by contact with classical European poetry.

Madhusudan wanted to be a great poet, not a glorified *kabirwala*, and a great poet by the Western standard, “which I am almost sure I shall be, if I can go to England”.<sup>29</sup> No other Bengali poet before Tagore made such arduous and ample preparations for the career of a poet or was ready to sacrifice so much for an “above all Greek, above all Roman fame”. As a young student of Hindu College, Shakespeare, taught by Capt. D. L. Richardson, enraptured him, Milton held him in thrall, and Scott and Byron invited imitation. The romantic sadness of his early poems was a borrowed conceit. Then he “broke Affections’ tenderest ties” and embraced Christianity, not for “the blest Saviour’s sake” as he claimed in a hymn on the occasion of his baptism, but to secure a passage to England, the sacred fen of poetry. This Derozian illusion deprived him of his patrimony and landed him in Madras, where he wrote two long poems—the *Captive Ladie* (1849) and *Rizia*. He considered them ‘glorious’. John Drinkwater Bethune disagreed with this complacent judgement and exhorted him to turn to Bengali, instead of aping the second best English poets.<sup>30</sup> Madhusudan must have been feeling the hollowness of his pretensions for some time.<sup>31</sup> One could not write as personal a thing as poetry in an alien tongue. Perhaps the success of Debendranath and Vidyasagar in prose inspired him. Perhaps, deep in his unconscious, the myths and legends he learnt on his mother’s lap, stirred. He found his model not in the romantic but in the classical poetry of the West and the East. At Madras we see him slaving away at Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. “Am I not preparing for the great object of embellishing the tongue of my fathers?”<sup>32</sup>

His first essay in vernacular was a drama—*Sarmisthā* (1859) about which hung a foreign air. He did not care, for he had been writing for the educated and “it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration of everything Sanskrit.” If imitation of Byron would not pay, why should imitation of Kalidasa? He must at last be his own self, from time to time, though he might “borrow a necktie, or even a waist coat . . . .”.

For the next drama, *Padmāvati* (1860), he borrowed more than a necktie. He refused “to be bound down by the dicta of Mr. Viswanath of the Sahitya Darpan”,<sup>33</sup> the first act was “the Greek story of the golden apple Indianised”, and he experimented with the blank verse. In *Sarmisthā* he often stepped out of the path of the dramatist for that of the mere poet. In *Padmāvati* he endeavoured “to create characters who speak as nature suggests and not mouth mere poetry”. *Krishna Kumāri* came next (1861). It was his best in the dramatic line but the best was not good enough by the high standard he set himself. He could create Dhanadas, no Iago; his *Madanikā* was obviously Rosalind or Viola in



Indian *saree*, his Bhimsinha, a Rana of Udaipur, was a cry baby and his heroine, Krishna Kumari, could not rise to the stature of Padmini because the tragic setting was very weak. He knew he would never reach European excellence. In a revealing letter to Rajnarayan he made the different social and moral environment of India responsible. "Alas! for the drama. But this is not the age for the drama to flourish. We want the public ear attuned to the melody of the Blank Verse."

The immediately successful experiment in blank verse in *Tillottomā Sambhaba Kāvya* (1860) and its highest culmination in *Meghnādbadhā Kāvya* (1861) mark not only a watershed in Bengali literature but a new phase in the growth of Bengali literary taste. Rangalal Bandyopadhyay's lay of medieval Rajasthan—*Padmini Upākhyān* (1858) showed the possibilities and the limitations of the style of Byron, Scott and Moore. Its heroic theme, recounting the glory of Hindu chivalry, was a psychological compensation as well as a call to patriotic action. But the rhyme scheme was traditional and behind Byron and Moore peeped the shades of Bharatchandra and Iswar Gupta. He followed it up with *Karma Debi* (1862), *Sura Sundari* (1868) and *Kānchi Kāberi* (1879) but the blank verse revolution had made them obsolete by then.

Michael had outgrown the lesser romantics by the 1850's. He now apotheosised Milton. But though a Christian and an avid admirer of the Puritan poet, he was too secular to be tempted to write another *Paradise Lost* (or *Divine Comedy*). Greek humanism spoke through Homer and Virgil sang of a terrestrial imperial splendour. All these merged in one grand design which held heaven, earth and hell, gods, men and Satan in the toils of an inscrutable, inexorable fate against which men fought as equals and, in failure, remained heroic. Madhusudan does not hold out any hope of salvation through Beatrice's love or Christ's Passion.

*Meghnādbadhā Kāvya* is a synthetic product in which the ingredients were classical (Greek and Latin) and English poetry, with Valmiki condescendingly thrown in. The theme is an episode in the long struggle between Rama and Ravana, where Lakshmana kills Meghanada by a stratagem with divine help. Obviously the poet was trying to put a new life into the old story of Hector's death in the hands of Achilles.<sup>34</sup> The concept of struggle is definitely Homeric—one between equals and rivals rather than between good and evil, God and Satan. The hero, Ravana (one may differ and call Meghanada hero—technically), is not concerned at every step like Rama with virtue and vice but bent on satisfying the normal human urge for power and glory. Madhu was allergic to "Rama and his rabble" and biased in favour of Ravana, "a fine fellow", and thereby challenged the cherished images. Any one who sees Rama trembling before Pramila's female envoy and appealing to Bibhishana for protection (Canto III) or refusing in tears to part with Lakshmana on his fateful mission even at the cost of dropping the campaign for Sita (Canto VI), will not recognise in him the *नरचक्रवर्ति* of Valmiki. Lakshmana shows no more mettle and weeps on the shoulders of Māyā. Allusions



to Homer abound ; gods conspire in Olympian fashion in Cantos II and V ; Pārvati behaves like Juno ; Pramila looks like Tasso's Clorinda ; one epic simile after another is bodily lifted from Milton and the whole eighth Canto is inspired by *Aeneid* and *Divine Comedy*. Indrajit meets with Hector's burial minus the libation of wine. It was an open revolt in one sense and an abject slavishness in another. Valmiki never felt the need to belittle Lakhmana to glorify Meghanada. Their battle, as depicted in Ramayana, lasted for full three days.

In one view Madhu was using Ravana as the symbol of an elemental power. It does not wend its cautious way between right and wrong only to take the latter when it helps (as Lakshmana does). It does not exalt in false renunciation and repression but, in supreme amoral egoism, defies gods and fate. Madhu clothed absolute power in dazzling magnificence and made it irresistible. Others have seen in Ravana and Meghanada the awakening national consciousness of India, manfully sacrificing itself in patriotic resistance. A third view may be that he was unwittingly giving expression to the pretentious ambitions of his own class. The tragedy of Ravana is symbolic of a personal and class tragedy, inherent in ambitions never to be fulfilled in an alien economy by a superior (as well as supercilious) ruling power.

In fact, the epic fails to acquire a tragic grandeur, which was the poet's objective. Ravana, though not as often as Rama, sheds helpless tears and like a crossed child accuses fate for all his misfortune (Canto I). He is neither Satan nor Mephistopheles but at best a broken-hearted Priam whose faith in *deus ex machina* has failed. Did then, the poet's circumstances, dominated by the traditional doctrine of *Karma* and concept of sin, rule out a healthy paganism? Did the pettiness of middle class trials and tribulations render Ravana's rebellion ridiculous? Did the belated awareness that in British India the poet had met a Europe not of Homer, Shakespeare and Milton but a Europe with Manchester-made cloth, mercantile morals and maxim guns decide that the hero would end not with a bang but in a whimper?

Apart from this sociological explanation of the weakness of the tragic element and epic grandeur, we may point out two more. Madhusudan's poetic personality was a split personality. While he was romantic by temperament, he was a classicist by taste. While he excelled in lyrical expression, he attempted the epic form. No doubt he chose the latter to portray his grand vision—it would have burst the shell of a lyric. But the subterranean conflict between temper and taste, instinctive inclination and acquired skill affected the structure of the poem. Secondly, he was much too in a hurry to care when "the thoughts and images bring out words with themselves—words that I never thought I knew." Against one example of Michael's preoccupation with technical problems and mature sense of values, given by Bishnu Dey, ten may be posed which reveal an utter recklessness. Between his first essay in Bengali language and his *magnum opus* lay two years, not long enough to enable a poet



to wrest the laurel from Milton's brow. Madhusudan was too impetuous to delve deeply into the spirit of the epic or to organise and perfect its form. *Meghanādbadha Kāvya* remains a brilliant *tour de force*—a magnificent mosaic, but not an organic whole.

Yet he is the father of modern Bengali poetry and the architect of the technical revolution which liberated Bengali verse from the fetters of *payār*. Though Dr. Sukumar Sen does not regard blank verse to be a foreign import, since freedom of pause in *payār* is its main characteristic and not the absence of rhyme at the end, there is no denying experiment with the Miltonic model. But Madhu borrowed his vocabulary largely from Sanskrit and he had the innate sense of the sound and movement of the Bengali speech—rhythm, which, in spite of all the foreign trappings, immediately appealed to a wide public. His Sanskriticisms jar sometimes; his prolific use of *নামধাতু* is often atrocious. But the former introduces a classical vigour and the latter a romantic mellowness. No character could be sweeter and more Indian than his Sita (for whom his poor mother must have been the model). Pramila displays another face of Indian womanhood and the contrast has enriched the epic. Many so-called epic similes are really examples of *মালোপমা* and his imagery (in the fourth and sixth Cantos, his finest) is mostly Indian.

The idea of *Birānganā-Kāvya* grew out of Pramila and the poet's eternal hunger for experiments—this time with Ovid's *Heroic Epistles*.<sup>35</sup> *Brajānganā-Kāvya* shows his lyrical possibility (e.g. *Jamunā Tate*, *Mayuri*, *Kusum*), though, as he was temperamentally anything but a Vaishnava, the inspiration often flags. Repelled by the apparently erotic imagery of Vaishnava poets, he made his 'Mrs. Radha' 'a good woman' to his own satisfaction. He created the Bengali sonnet in the Petrarchan measure<sup>36</sup> and some of them, e.g. *Kāśirām Dās*, *Kālidāsa*, *Kabī*, *Asvinmās*, *Sāyamkāler Tārā*, *Viyayādasami*, etc., are the finest that have been written in our language.

Madhusudan's success influenced a whole generation of poets and dramatists. Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nildarpan* (1860) dealt with a socio-economic problem and not with any mythological or bardic theme like *Sarmisthā* or *Krishnakumari* but there is no doubt that Madhusudan's brilliant farces on the *babu* and the orthodox—*Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyatā?* (1860) and *Buro Saṅiker Ghāre Ron* (1860)—moulded Dinabandhu's *Sadhabār Ekādasi* (1866) and *Jāmai Bārik* (1872) as much as Iswar Chandra Gupta's satirical poems. Bankimchandra lays stress on the latter. But the conception of a Nimo Datta is alone possible for a highly sophisticated dramatist, acquainted with English literature, and his Atal is definitely based on Nabababu, the hero of *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyatā?* He beats Madhusudan, however, in intimate knowledge of, and spontaneous sympathy with, a wide range of his own countrymen, who emerge as unforgettable *dramatis personae*: Torap or Aduri, Jaladhar or Jagadamba, Naderchand or Ghatiram. Compared to these side characters the heroes and



heroines appear to be lifeless and artificial. The whole tragic tone of Nil-darpan is shattered by the chaste, high-faluting language in which the hero and the heroine express their grief, while, in one memorable scene, Kshetramani's helpless anger and revulsion finds thunder in the virile (and vulgar) language of the peasant.

Hemchandra Bandyopadhyaya and Nabinchandra Sen took up the epic tradition of Madhusudan but could not bend his bow of Ulysses. They were highly acclaimed as they were in tune with the times which felt the first rejuvenating impulse of nationalism and dreamt of heroic struggles and sacrifices. Hemchandra's *Virabāhu Kāvya* (1864) sings of the past glories of India whose "fatal gift of beauty" became "a funeral dower of present woes". The poet, like Byron, invokes God to drive the robbers back. *Vritra Samhār Kāvya* (1875) is a patriotic elaboration of the Puranic story of the fight between gods and demons, who drove the former from their homeland, and the ultimate recovery of heaven at the cost of Dadhichi's self-sacrifice. As an epic it draws heavily from *Tilotamā Sambhaba* and *Meghanādabadha* though it is much more rigid than the latter, more sentimental and less virile. Hemchandra betrays an ignorance of the principle of blank verse and feels freer with the rhyming meter. His lyricism found expression in smaller poems like *Jamunatate*, *Kaminikusum*, *Kalpāna* and *Kamalbilasi*.

Nabinchandra's trilogy, viz. *Raibatak* (1886), *Kurukshetra* (1893) and *Prabhās* (1896), apparently follow the life story of Srikrishna as given in the Mahabharata and the Puranas but the real aim of the poet was "to put before the people of Bengal the lofty and ennobling ideal of Srikrishna, the 'divine man'—perfect in his wisdom, valour and vision, but tenderest in love and sympathy—whose special mission was to create a 'Great India' (*Mahā Bhārata*) out of the chaos of the then shattered political life, full of religious controversy and animosity and social inequities."<sup>37</sup>

Nabinchandra justifies "the ways of God to man" in this trilogy with a cocktail of Darwin (as elaborated by Spencer) and the *Gita*. Krishna explains to Vyasa the organic view of the Aryan society which has progressed from the childhood of totem and taboo to the adolescence of the Vedic sacrifices, while a youth of scientific knowledge and an ultimate maturity in Godhead lie ahead.

“অনন্ত উন্নতি

প্রকৃতির নীতি, প্রভো! নহে অবনতি!

মানব অপূর্ণ, মাত্র পূর্ণ নারায়ণ

.....যাইব ভাসিয়া

সেই পূর্ণতার দিকে, নিব ভাসাইয়া

সমস্ত মানবজাতি উন্নতির পথে।”

This linear evolution comes out of an eternal struggle for existence; the *Avatāra* is the supreme manifestation of the mutations necessary for



the species to adapt itself to a particular environment ; the Universe is one temple of religion founded on the good of mankind and the final goal is Nārāyana.

এক ধর্ম, এক জাতি  
একই সাম্রাজ্যনীতি  
সকলের একভিত্তি—সর্বভূতহিত  
সাধনা নিকাম কর্ম  
লক্ষ্য সে পরমব্রহ্ম  
একমেবাদ্বিতীয়ম্, করিব নিশ্চিত  
এই ধর্মরাজ্য—মহাভারত—স্থাপিত ।

Good for a kind of philosophy but how awful in pages and pages of poetry. To humanise the conflict (political, social and religious in character, and fought between Durbāsā and Srikrishna) he has introduced two stories of triangular love (Jaratkāru—Krishna—Satyabhāmā and Bāsuki—Subhadrā—Arjun). This adversely affects both the symbolic and the human character of the epic. *Kurukshetra* is a better work, though, even here the romance of Abhimanyu (Canto XI) and the agony of love-lorn Kāru (Canto VIII) are marred by variations on the Krishna theme. Subhadrā's philosophic calm at Abhimanyu's death irritates rather than consoles us with Krishnatattva. *Prabhās* becomes more heavily loaded with biological abracadabra such as :

কল্পে কল্পে মহাচক্রে, জন্মে জন্মে আর  
জীবগণ বিবর্তন চক্রে ক্ষুদ্রতম,  
কালারম্ভে এককর্মী, এক কর্ম আর  
এক মহাধর্মনীতি—নীতি বিবর্তন ॥

The trilogy is a monumental misadventure in poetry of ideas. The *Palasir Yuddha* (1877) deals with the more recent past. As Sir Jadunath says, Nabin "has washed away the follies and crimes of Siraj by artfully drawing forth his reader's tears for fallen greatness and blighted youth". But the poet's object was not to write a *Siraj-badha Kavya*. The real sacrifice here is Bengal, and ultimately India, which Krishna helped to build up and Nabin would have liked to be revived. It suffers from a surfeit of lyricism. The narrative portions are clogged with romantic effusion. The poet loses himself too often in moral indignation and patriotic fervour. Yet these prove to be his strength when declaimed by a Rani Bhabani or a Mohanlal.

Meanwhile, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar had brought about a revolution in Bengali prose. Vidyasagar's native integrity was enriched by Western empiricism and enlivened by Western energy. Yet strongly rooted in the Indian society, one of her poor millions and inheritor of



her classical values, he responded to the culture of the West with the sturdy independence of an ancient sage. Sri Benoy Ghosh has laboured the point of Western humanism to explain Vidyasagar, which needs a rejoinder. Relying too much on Symonds, he is misled on the various shades of meaning which the concept of 'humanism' bore at different stages of the Renaissance. "Of all these dead 'isms'," writes Denys Hay, "the most pernicious is the word 'humanism'. On the one hand it has been lifted out of history to become a kind of permanent emotional state, applicable to Abelard or the modern existentialist, on the other hand it has been applied indiscriminately to any one in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries who wrote a line or two of Latin or Greek"<sup>38</sup> Surely, Ghosh does not mean that Vidyasagar confined himself to *studia humanitatis* i.e. Vidyasagar was a pedantic rhetorician and an old grammarian, which is its proper meaning.<sup>39</sup> Again, he mixes up pagan and Christian humanism. He even takes Renaissance individualism to be its equivalent. But the altruistic nucleus of Vidyasagar's ideas and his overriding sense of social responsibility are entirely lacking in later humanism, which was, to say the least, vain and egotistical. In fact, one of Burchkardt's objectives was to show how the Renaissance dissolved the public spirit. Where is the humanist courtier and career-seeker in Vidyasagar? Where are Vidyasagar's chivalry and heroic qualities in Erasmus whose everlasting evasions and self-justifications would have drawn a smile of contempt from the former? In him there is neither the union of Antiquity and Hindu spirit nor the irresistible fascination for the pagan beauty of form which we call humanism. He did not take refuge in the company of select friends, in the world of books or in the lap of serene nature to admonish and warn. In clarity, simple dignity, noble anger at human stupidity or snobbery and critical attitude towards religious dogmas he is equal to any humanist. But he beats them in the passion and vigour to make the world a newer, freer, happier and more educated world. He was no dandy and Madhusudan's irresponsible egotism repelled him. He was no 'idealist' either and he threw Vedanta, Samkhya and Berkeley out of the Sanskrit College syllabus. He would, unlike the Renaissance individualist, harness all manifestations of extreme individualism, old or new, to a practical social purpose. If he had the heart of a St. Francis, he had the organising ability of a St. Bernard and, when the Derozians with all their radical views lacked the moral courage of action, he had more than his share of it.

A social purpose dominates his literary activities as all others of his life. A true humanist would have liked to savour the Sanskrit poetry or drama in the original; he would not have bothered, like an utilitarian educator, to recreate them in a felicitous and fluent Bengali prose. He has taken from various sources—*Vetal Panchavimsati* (1847) from Hindi, *Vāṅglar Itihash* from Stewart's *History of Bengal*, *Bhrantibilas* (1869) from Shakespeare and *Kathamala* (1856) from *Aesop's Fables* but his best are naturally from Sanskrit. *Sakuntala* (1854) and *Sitar Banabas* (1860)



commemorate two greatest classical dramatists—Kalidasa and Bhababhuti. He wrote many polemics on widow remarriage, characterised by a vigorous thrust at his opponents, an elegy (*Prabhābati Sambhāshan*) and a simple autobiographical essay (1891). Rabindranath acclaims him as “the first real artist in Bengali language”, who brought order out of chaos and gave it an easy mobility and simple effectiveness. The scientific use of punctuation was itself a major revolution which made the inert style of Mrityunjoy or Rammohun dynamic. The shedding of the heavy load of *samāsa* and the neat division of sentences into clauses helped the process further. But a greater contribution was the introduction of a rhythm into Bengali prose, a harmony of sound values and an unerring choice of the right phrase for the right purpose. In all this he was never pretentious and his prose retained a chaste, classical flavour and a clean, native ring. One finds virtues of good poetry (except ambiguity) in his prose.

The development of his style is perceptible to anybody who compares a passage from *Sitār Banabās* with one from *Brajabilas* or *Ati Alpa Hail*. The former bristles with sanskritised turns of phrase and idiom, the compounds have been broken up but the words resound like cannonade. Only a new syntax and a clever punctuation save them. The latter is racy, even colloquial, and sharpens the edge of dialectic with rollicking fun. I have no doubt that his missionary zeal for the causes of the widows and the illiterate helped him to discover the common speech—rhythm and enliven it with a wit, which anticipates *Kamalākānta*.

## 3

What was a young sapling in Vidyasagar grew to be a sturdy oak in Bankimchandra. With him we pass on to a different intellectual climate. The utilitarian phase was over by the 1860's, the reign of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill at an end. They were replaced by Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. The West's mastery over physical sciences overwhelmed us in the first phase, its discoveries in biology and sociology gave new food for thought in the second. Its glamour dazzled less and even Michael wept for the years wasted in pursuit of the Western mirage. The Romantic Movement had long passed its prime and, after the strong dose of classicism imparted by Michael, it could cheer but not inebriate the imagination. Historians, mainly of the West, had brought to light the wonder that was India and had filled the Indian, suffering from a surfeit of inferiority complex, with a healthy consciousness of his own worth and greatness. After Vidyasagar's noble example (and Michael's colossal tragedy), it was no longer possible to place the individual above the society. It is not surprising that Bankim sought for laws of social evolution *a la* Comte and Spencer, that he placed the individual in the social context *a la* John Stuart Mill, that he gave up Voltaire's *a priori* philosophy of history for a scientific analysis or that, without falling an



easy prey to romanticism, he absorbed its creative attitudes, integrating feelings and emotions with reason and self-control.

It must be noted here that Bankim derived much of his romanticism not from the English romantic poets (though he was aware of them as much as Rangalal or Nabin) but from a romantic generation of British historians of India—Elphinstone, Malcolm, Grant Duff and Tod. It was a conservative romanticism, as distinct from the literary, which set out to revolutionise India on abstract principles. He concluded that human experience was too vast and rich to be comprehended by Benthamism and that progress was not an unquestioned assumption. He had an ambivalence to his environment. He liked the liberating influence of Western thought but abhorred the destructive, exploiting character of Western rule and economy and the reforming zeal which belittled whatever was Indian or Hindu. He was bitterly aware of the profound social transformation that India had been undergoing and the consequent loss of old values. Unable to undo the sale of the Indian soul for the mess of the Western pottage, he sought to trace its course in history and found its cause in the decline of character (which implied not only integrity and dignity but also a sense of social solidarity and responsibility). Inevitably he turned to the pre-British periods, then being unravelled by the researches of the orientalist.

The charges of escapism and Hindu revivalism have been unduly laid at his door. Had he been really an escapist he would have gone back, in the Pre-Raphaelite manner, to the golden days of the Hindu Renaissance, e.g. the Gupta period. But the scenes of most of his historical novels are laid in the early or late Moslem India, when Hindu powers were decadent or dead. *Rājsimha* alone deals with a revival of Hindu chivalry. In a memorable passage in *Sitāram*, while extolling the sculptural beauties of Lalitgiri (Orissa), he shows what he held to be the hall mark of Hindu civilisation and in another nostalgic piece in *Kamala Kanter Daftar* (Amar Durgotsab) he shows from what height of cultural glory Bengal had fallen. Those were the halcyon days and would India or Bengal, without special effort, ever regain them? His answer was 'no'. "The fault, dear Brutus, is in us". It was Pasupati's ambition (*Mrinalini*), Gangaram's treachery (*Sitaram*), Bhabananda's weakness (*Anandamath*), Sitaram's unbridled passion (*Sitaram*), which worked like an inexorable fate to bring about our fall.

Were then individuals mere playthings in the hands of history or their own characters, swept like flotsam on the mighty torrent of power and passion? Bankim does not play on the theme of power like Marlowe or Shakespeare but in many of his novels he elaborates on the theme of passion—passion which disintegrates personality, destroys the balance between intellect and instinct and drowns the rational self in a welter of emotions. Of his three first novels—*Durgeshnandini*, *Kapālkundalā* and *Mrinālini*—only *Mrinālini* deals with the fall of a Hindu kingdom, but the heroes of all three disintegrate under the impact of unfounded sex-



jealousy. Jagat Sinha, Nabakumar and Hemchandra suspect disloyalty in their heroines and break down like Othello. Nagendranath, Gobindalal and Sitaram are ideal characters at the beginning and Bhabananda is an initiated monk. But their self-control vanishes under the impulse of what Bankim calls *কপতৃষ্ণা*. All of it is not carnal. Its aesthetic aspect only heightens the poignancy of personal tragedy. But what is their personal tragedy compared to the tragedy they inflict on people around them? Nagendranath's 'Poison Tree' blasts a happy family life and blights Kundanandini's young and unrequited love. Would the reunion of Nagendra and Suryamukhi bridge the gulf between them created by Kunda, alive, and perpetuated by Kunda, dead? Innocent Bhramar pays the supreme penalty for Gobindalal's passion as much as the guilty Rohini. Sitaram loses his humanity when he orders Jayanti to be whipped naked and then loses a kingdom, so valiantly built up. Bhabananda loses even more—the fruit of a life-long *sadhana*. Saibalini makes her husband unhappy and pushes her lover, Pratap, to death. Everywhere the same story: the wound an individual inflicts on himself creates a much deeper wound on the society at large.

The basic problem, then, was the discovery of the individual's place in society. The individualism of the Young Bengal repelled Bankim and that of the boorish *babu* he ridiculed in delightful *belles-lettres* resembling *Praise of Folly*. He took up Spencer's idea of an organismic society of which the individual formed an integral part and found similar views in Hindu shastras, especially the *Bhagavata* and the *Gita*. Integration of the individual in the social organism he began to look upon as the goal of true religion and true morality. His moral code was based on biology. That conduct was moral which made a group or individual more integrated and coherent. This synthesis of Comte and Spencer on the one hand and the *Bhagavata* and the *Gita* on the other he called *Anusilan dharma*. He wrote his last novels—*Debi Chaudhurani* and *Sitaram*, a biography of Krishna (*Krishnacharitra*) and a religious tract (*Dharma-tattva*) to propagate it (অনুশীলন ধর্মপ্রচারের কলমাত্র).

The necessity of self-control for happiness he proclaimed in his very first novel through the character of Ayesha (*Durgeshanandini*). But it took sometime to establish this self-control not merely as a negative (and Christian) virtue of abstinence but a positive means to the complete realization of an integrated personality.

Needless to say, he saw salvation neither in the grace of God nor in reforms by a social agency. No reforms imposed from above could regenerate. Salvation came from Anusilan or the individual's own rigorous efforts in self-education, guided and supported by the true preceptor. It consisted of three stages—(a) full development and integration of instincts (শারীরিক, জ্ঞানার্জন, কার্যকারিতা, চিত্তবৃত্তি), (b) *bhakti*, firmly attached to God, and (c) *priti* or love for all creatures. Srikrishna was the



greatest embodiment of this harmonious development. Bankim's key word is not Benthamite হিত but শ্রীতি.

The latterday nationalist made of him the prophet of Indian nationalism and the poet of patriotism. But patriotism was to him not an end in itself, it was merely a step to *priti*, which erected no frontiers between man and man (e.g. between Sitaram and Rama Kaivarta) nor again between the East and the West. Universalism of Bankimchandra was not eclectic as in Rammohun but maturer and more firmly rooted in psychology, sociology and culture of the Indian people. The religious basis of his patriotism has no parochialism of religion.

Debi (*Debi Chaudhurāni*) is the exponent of this *Anusilan dharma*. For her predecessors Bankim had prescribed destruction or sublimation. I have cited the example of Ayesha as belonging to the second category. Bhramar, Santi and Jibananda see light in this path. But Saibalini, whose animal vitality amounts to "Life force," is made to undergo torture in a Dantesque hell. Here, and not, as widely supposed, in the portrayal of Rohini did Bankim the moralist overcome Bankim the artist. Bankim never had any sympathy for Rohini and had drawn her from the beginning a sex-starved and small-minded woman. She deserved her end in a way for, although she had snatched Gobindalal from Bhramar and seemingly satisfied her pent-up passion, she was not above alluring an unknown *beau* (Nishanath). Saibalini is made of a different stuff. Chandrasekhar separated her from Pratap unknowingly but neglected her in the most psychologically crucial years. Whatever she might have done she kept her zest for life burning and her love for Pratap abiding. She would not die for him as she always hoped to live with him. This *elan vital*—unashamed and turbulent—makes her the most interesting character Bankim ever created. To the moralist, however, it was harmful to society and Saibalini suffered like Rohini and Kunda—perhaps more, for they escaped the travails of this world with death while Saibalini had to prove her chastity before a court after passing through the fires of hell! Prafulla (Debi) needs fear no such crisis. She has been trained against all emotional involvement for full five years in a manner Vyasa and Spencer would have approved. It is fortunate that she remains human enough after that to tremble at her husband's touch or perform the meanest of household chores. She does not turn out to be an abstract idea of non-attached virtue like Sree (*Sitāram*).

Bankim is our greatest novelist in spite of his moral tone and didactic temper. It is not his philosophy but the drama of human life and intricate psychology of character which make his novels so convincing. History lends poetry and drama to many of them. Historical novel, says Prof. Trevelyan, presents "history as an eager aspiration, destined to perpetual change, doomed to everlasting perfection, but living, complex and broad as history itself". What might have been is not the same as what was and fiction would never provide a substitute for genuine history. But history is by its nature inadequate; the dead carry most



of their secrets with them to the grave. The historical novel tries by means of imaginary and historical characters to unravel as much of it as possible. Bankim does this admirably. Not only does he distil the spirit of the age but display a mastery of details which earns the praise of no less a scholar than Sir Jadunath.<sup>40</sup> No one else could have conveyed the swift pace of history in so few deft touches. We feel the roll of drums and the rumble of horseman in our veins as the Mughals and the Rajputs clash in a narrow defile in *Rājsinha*. He selected one incident from Tod, another from Orme and a third from imagination. But the main events and outlines of characters do not travesty facts. Bankim did not stake out for any other novel a claim to historicity. But in the sense of Trevelyan a few more belong to that *genre*. Bankim knew his Bengal as Scott knew his Highlands. *Mrinālini*, *Durgeshanandini*, *Sitārām*, *Debi Chaoudhurāni* and *Anandamath*, read in that sequence, are our Waverley novels, covering a vast stretch of Bengal history from the Moslem invasion to the establishment of British rule under Warren Hastings. He is master not only of history in breadth but also of history in depth. In his novels history often assumes the character of fate. Tilottama is almost sacrificed during the Mughal-Pathan war. The historical fact of Jahangir's undying passion for Meher gives a complete turn to Matibibi's life and brings her into clash with Kapālkundalā which proves the latter's undoing. The conflict between Mir Kasim and the English affects Dalani's life like doom. Ramā is crushed by Sitāram's struggle for an independent Hindu kingdom. Manoramā is caught in the web of a political conspiracy which engulfed Bengal at the time of Bakhtiyar Khilji's invasion.

Bankim's analysis of psychology is no less profound and is in some cases more original. Take for example, Kapālkundalā. Superficially she resembles Miranda but is very different in close up. Though nurtured away from the influences of ordinary human society Miranda is not denied a father's love. The father, again, is no ascetic but dreams of getting back the throne he has been wrongfully deprived of. The world, one can imagine, is too much with the people living on that island of Miranda. Kapalkundala is not so fortunate. Her environment is far more unwordly and inhuman. Kāpālik brings her up not with the tender feelings of a father but with the awe-inspiring detachment of a *Tāntrik* for the consummation of his gruesome *sādhana*. She has often seen human sacrifice and has grown indifferent to her own life. She even thinks of it as a sacrifice to the Divine Mother, to be offered whenever She chooses to call for it. Therein lies her salvation, her fate. Yet she is not callous to other lives. She derives her all embracing pity, along with her supreme detachment, from nature and even from the Divine Mother herself, whose manifestation nature is, and who, like nature, protects as well as destroys. Passion of love, as we understand it, is foreign to her character (as to nature) and she knows not how to respond to Nabakumar's. This is why she is a misfit in Saptagram and yearns for



the call of the infinite sea and the impenetrable forest which symbolised for her the inscrutable and inexorable mystery that surrounds life and death. Mati's imperial glamour fades before this mystique. Kapāl-kundalā rises from the sea and dissolves into the sea, the most moving and poetic creation of our literature. Example from another pole, Jebun-nisa of *Rājsinha*. An Emperor's daughter is not a prey to love like an ordinary woman, she boasted to Mobarak. Unknown to herself, the 'poison' of love enters her soul and corrodes it from within. She orders assassination of Mobarak as if he is a worm and, after the gruesome deed is done, flings herself on the bare ground and weeps inconsolably for him. Her character is not static like that of Kapāl-kundalā but moves with a dynamism, which love alone can impart, to the supreme realisation that before it the princess and beggar-maid (Dariyā) are on the same level of happiness or misery. These two are the most amoral stories of Bankim, where character is destiny.

Bankim makes Suryamukhi's tragedy convincing by portraying her as a dominating partner, as a possessive and motherly character, who is naturally unable to satisfy Nagendra's male urge for protecting a weaker female. He makes Nagendra's tragedy convincing by portraying a dualism in him, his simultaneous need for a mother and a wife. If Bhramar was not too proud and was a little more tactful, she might have cleared up Gobindalal's mess. Her tremendous will power and strength of character saved her dignity to the end. Chandrasekhar understands and, therefore, forgives, although that memorable scene, where he puts all his precious *shastras* into fire, shows how deep the wound Saibalini has inflicted. Mir Kasim does not understand Dalani and she pays with her life.

Where Bankim plants the prime mover of human destiny outside the man's character in some external circumstances or agency he fails to reach the sublime. He has a *penchant* for bringing in astrologers or *Sannysins* to foretell the cause of events or to save a desperate situation i.e. to act as *deus ex machina*. This is reduced to absurdity in *Durgeshanandini* where Abhiram Swami advises Birendra against joining the Pathans because Tilottama will come to harm from a "Moghul general", who actually turns out to be a Pathan soldier. Also in *Mrinalini* where Hemachandra's *guru* hopes that "a merchant from the west" will drive away the Pathans. Who else could it be but Hemachandra who had resided for sometime in the disguise of a merchant at Mathura which is in the west? It is *Sannyasin* who cures Amarnath's insanity and Rajani's blindness. It is a *yogi* who transforms the character of Saibalini by his psychic force. The whole tragedy of *Sitārām* revolves round the prediction that Sree will be the 'killer of a dear one' ( *প্রিয়তম-নাশক* ) and who else could it be but her husband *Sitārām*? This explains her aloofness and *Sitaram's* frustrated passion, which leads to his degeneration and fall, while actually she kills her brother Gangaram. Is Bankim emphasizing the mysterious ways of fate which delude people and strike them while, by their puerile subterfuges, they hope to circumvent it? He seems to take directly from



Macbeth where the witches speak in oracular ambiguity and Macbeth's hopes to escape his fate are reduced to mockery as soldiers carrying sprigs of Birnam wood come to Dunsinane and Macduff turns out to be "of no woman born".

'Kamalākānta' is the first example of '*belles-lettres*' in our literature and still remains a model. To compare it to De Quincey's '*Confessions of an Opium eater*' is most unfair. He pours into these pieces not only wit and irony and scorn and bitterness of an imperious soul but the tender nostalgia of a poet and the deeply stirred imagination of a patriot. Kamalākānta is not a fool though he poses to be one. His intellect is penetrating and knowledge prodigious. Yet he appears to be eccentric, more so because he has realized the emptiness of our pretensions, the vanity of all vanities. He not only defies the social conventions but the biological distinctions between man and bird and worm and flower. To him Bismarck's politics is the politics of the ox and Bengali politics, that of the mere dog. The cat symbolises to him the socialist and the man, who shoos him away, the prototype of the capitalist. He sees no high ideals in human relations but only the morality of the market place. Everything is on sale here, the beauty of a woman, the learning of a scholar, the creative activity of a litterateur and even the integrity of a judge. Only a highly philosophic detachment can see through pretensions of philosophy and he equates Bentham's utilitarianism with উদ্বোধন or the philosophy of a *gourmand*. But is he so detached after all? There is a tender pathos in Kamalakanta's mind—of youth slipping away and hopes receding (which the Greeks often felt). His love for Bengal and for Man in General finds sublime expression in আমার দুর্গোৎসব, একটি গীত and ঐক্য. Without these nostalgic pieces *Kamalākānta* would have been forgotten after the issues he satirised had died out.

A review of Bankimchandra's works will not be complete without reference to the high standards of criticism he laid down as the editor of *Bangadarshan* and to the critical essays he himself wrote. His range is very wide, covering scientific, literary, philosophical and historical topics. I would like to mention specially essays on Indian history, the Bengali people and the Bengali *ryot*, including *Samya*. The discussions are brilliant forays in sociology where the historical sense is never lost sight of and passion or prejudice plays no part. His intellect always remains objective, tone serious, and taste subtly discriminating.

Above everything else, however, is Bankim's finished craftsmanship. His youthful ambition had been to be a poet in Iswar Gupta's tradition but he realized his limitations early and courted the novel form with immediate success. Yet he remained a poet all along, with Tagore the greatest poet of Bengali prose. Take any image of nature, of the sea or the moonlit night, the forest or the mountain, and Bankim's lyricism will hit you in the eye. Every description of womanly beauty is a little ode. He can vary it according to his theme. Three such descriptions of



Tilottoma, Bimala and Asmani—in the very first novel—come to our mind. So with mood. Lyricism may give way to epic grandeur or tragic sombreness if occasion so demands. He has a *penchant* for breaking into songs, the full play of which we see in *Mrinālinī*, *Indirā* and *Anandamath*. But they are always relevant. Who else could have put *বৌবন জলতরঙ্গ রোদেবে কে?* and *বন্দে মাতরম্* in the same novel with equally great effect? The *Bandemataram* still remains our unofficial national song because of its unsurpassed poetic qualities and not because of its religious associations. In Bankim's hands the rich, sonorous Sanskrit becomes supple clay. What was heavy in Vidyasagar melted into melody and danced with the nimble feet of nymphs to all possible scales. And sometimes with the feet of imps.

Among the minor authors of the pre-Bankim period Debendranath and his *Tattvabodhini* group must be mentioned. Debendranath's *Atma Jibani* (1898) holds a mirror to his unique personality—a simple soul face to face with the Supreme Reality and seeing His manifestation in everything of this world. He talks to us not as the grave Acharya of the Brahmo Samaj or the Maharshi, aloof and unattainable, but as one of our friends. It does not spurn reality as reality is a face of God and the travel pieces, scattered in *Atma Jibani*, sparkle with this awareness. If he lacks in humour, his disciple, Rājñārayan Basu, does not, as is proved by his "*Se Kal O Ekal*" (1876). Rājñārayan's evocation of the banian English or the *babu* manners is memorable. His history of the Hindu College portrays the Derozians with a fidelity that only Shibnath Shastri would equal. Akshoy Kumar Datta could never unbend like Rājñārayan. He was always his uncompromising scholarly self dealing with weighty physical or spiritual problems e.g. *বাহু বস্তুর সহিত মানবপ্রকৃতির সম্বন্ধবিচার* or *ভারতবর্ষীয় উপাসক সম্প্রদায়*. Only some of his essays in *Charupath* have the lightness of literature. Rājñārayan himself fell into a swing towards Hindu revivalism and his later works deal with Hindu hopes and aspirations.

Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827-94) was an uncompromising Hindu from beginning to end, and, though a contemporary of Michael at Hindu College, never sported himself as a modernist or a progressive. He was for early marriage; female education meant to him the training of a housewife; he did not turn his face away from polygamy or the hard life of the widows. He believed in the minutiae of all the duties of a Hindu householder. In *Pāribārik Prabandha* and *Āchār Prabandha* we seem to move in an entirely alien world where even Bankim would have hesitated to tread and which Rājñārayan in his most ardent Hindu phase would have avoided.

But a careful analysis of *Sāmājīk Prabandha* dispels much of this apprehension. He tries to understand the character of Hindu society by the application of comparative sociology. He rejects the organismic view. "Society is a moral individual essentially different from a physical individual." It is distinct from the state. He has no faith in the perfectibi-



lity of man or in a linear progress through Spencerian evolution but faith in the arduous realisation of self, which appears in cycles. He has a preference for the way of knowledge to that of devotion. Christianity, based on feelings and dependent on grace, is imperfect, while Hinduism, based on higher reason, is the most perfect religion. He is against the doctrine of equality which kindles ambition and discontent. He spurns materialism as well as utilitarianism, which think only in terms of temporal happiness.

Though many of these ideas are different from those of Vidyasagar and Bankim, Bhudev had influence on the later generations, especially on Bankim. There is a close parallel between Roshanara and Ayesha as between *Anguri Binimaya* and *Rajsinha*. In স্বপ্নলব্ধ ভারতবর্ষের ইতিহাস he dreamt of the regeneration of India under the Marathas and incorporation of the Moslems in a composite Indian nationalism. He saw India personified as a deity in *Pushpanjali* (1876) years before Bankim conceived her as the Divine Mother. Nationalism to him was an intermediate step in the evolution of self-love into the Vedantin's love for all sentient and insentient matter. His talk of সর্বজনীন প্রীতি reminds us of Bankim's *Anusilan*. His economic ideas influenced R. C. Dutt and flair for writing on economic topics, Haraprasad Shastri.

Among the writers nursed by Bankim in *Bangadarshan* the most prominent were his own brother, Sanjibchandra, Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay, Ramdas Sen, Chandranath Basu and Akshoychandra Sarkar. Akshoychandra could write so much like Bankim himself that one of his essays, 'Chandraloké' was incorporated in *Kamalakānta* by the Master. That he was no mere imitator can be seen from *Rupak O Rahasya*, a collection of satirical pieces. Sanjibchandra's *Palamau* is one of our finest travelogues. Chandranath Basu preferred heavier themes, yet, his *Phuler Bhasa* is a prose lyric. Ramdas Sen was a historian. Rajkrishna's *Nana Probandha* is a model of rational argument without the least emotional effusiveness of Chandrasekhar Mukhopadhyay.

They lacked a vigour, however, a vigour—spiritual in character but almost physical in impact—which Vivekananda imparted. If it was revivalism, it saved us from the evangelical emotionalism of Keshabchandra and his Hebraic emphasis on sin, predestination and election. At the same time it saved us from the crude, obscurantist and pseudo-scientific clap trap of Sasadhar Tarkachudamani. To him, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the many and the one are the same reality, perceived differently, because of the operation of *māyā*, by the human consciousness. God is the ocean into which all rivers of religion flow. The divine mother, Kali, is the many and the one, and beyond the many and the one—the *Ātman* of the *Upanishads*, the *Brahman* of the *Vedānta*. This synthesis satisfied the aesthetic susceptibilities and yet acted as a symbol for transcendental Reality. It offered an outlet for love and devotion and yet provided for metaphysical introspection which would rise above both



to *samadhi* or complete identification with the Absolute. It reflected the growing homogeneity of India and was the least scholastic and ritualistic of religions, providing for all levels of culture and spiritual attainment. Its universalism had the voice of perennial philosophy, its call for renunciation had appeal to man's innate idealism and its emphasis on service of fellowmen was a salve to an active, progressive conscience. He shook both the defensive and the self-complacent postures of Hinduism and set to adapt it to the urge of the modern mind and the needs of the modern society. He put social responsibility fairly and squarely on the shoulders of a rejuvenated Hinduism, which had so long served personal or class ends and the cause of an otherworldly salvation. He did not reject the West. On the contrary, he welcomed it as a teacher of technology, provided it exchanged its material ware for the Indian spiritual ideal. In this battle his prose was wielded like a sword, broad and sharp. It is witty and human, rational as well as emotional. It is crystal clear and gathers from conversational idiom a tremendous force which Sanskritised form would have been unable to impart. The sociological musings of Bankim were not lost on him (he himself was once an admirer of Hume, Comte and Spencer) but he was no apologist for our real shortcomings. In spite of all his knowledge Bankim was attached to the past; like a true Vedantin, Vivekananda stood no nonsense. He brushed the cobwebs of sentiment aside to reveal the elements of eternal verity, beauty and good in it. His prose scorches and enlightens and often reaches lyrical heights which only a great missionary could attain, as when he evokes the ideals of Indian womanhood or describes the Ganges at Hrishikes. *Bartaman Bharat*, *Paribrajak* and *Prachya* and *Paschatya* are written in prose we should be proud of.

In historical novels Rameshchandra Dutt followed Bankim, though at a distance. Rameshchandra's best comes in *Maharashtra Jiban Prabhat* where he deals with the Maratha resurgence under Shivaji. Some portions of *Rajput Jiban Sandhya*, e.g. where Pratap wins over Sákta Sinha after the battle of Haldighat or the death of Jhala, are memorable. But on the whole he has not succeeded in capturing or transmitting the spirit of the age. His prose is stilted and lacks the dramatic intensity of Bankim. We are never face to face with an inexorable destiny working through history or human character.

It seems that Bankim exhausted all dramatic possibilities. Even drama as a literary form sagged after Dinabandhu. The versatile Jyotirindranath Tagore failed to revive it. Only the zeal of Girishchandra Ghosh brought it to life. The literary quality of most of his works is poor but many of them were good for the stage in its infancy. Girish dwelt mainly on religious themes and great man motifs. The best in his mythological series is *Janā* and in his biographical series, *Vilva-mangal*. Nationalism of the *fin de siècle* left its imprint on *Sirajuddaula* and *Mirkasim* while *Prafulla* dealt with the tragedy of the middle class Bengali household. The throw-back to mythology and devotionism was



certainly due to Hindu revivalism in the air and the personal influence of Sri Ramakrishna. Girish was frankly didactic and mistook the dramatist for a moral educator. The smell of *yātrā* was not far off. There were too many events. There was too crude a divine agency in the character of a *bidushak*, an *avatar* or an apparently mad man or woman. In his social dramas tragedy often fed on the sentimental involvements of middle class life and the risks to which it was usually exposed, viz. a bank failure, a money decree, a loss of employment or widowhood of a daughter. The brother, usually a lawyer, was a convenient villain. Of such stuff tragedy is never made of. That form is too grand to be confined to the petty trials and tribulations of middle class life, which inevitably look still more petty in it than they actually are. A maudlin sentimentality washed by profuse tears and occasional deaths destroys the tragic tone. Take for instance, Jogesh of *Prafulla*. He is too weak to be a tragic hero and he has given up the fight even before it begins. His obsession with reputation pales before the ambition of a Macbeth, the jealousy of an Othello and the possessive love of a Lear. It would have been mere sob stuff were it not so sincere.

In Rabindranath Tagore we see all these strands of thought merging into a creative whole. The impact of Western ideas had evoked various responses in the nineteenth century. Some had attempted a synthesis between the East and the West in the field of learning, some in the field of social reforms and some again in the field of religion. Tagore not only inherited their traditions but blended them to effect another synthesis—in the realm of beauty. Free from the inner split which marred the efforts of Madhusudan and affected those of Bankim, Tagore looked forward to a Universal Humanity which is evolving through material, biological, rational and religious planes to fulfil a spiritual destiny. Humanism transcends the fragmented connotation of intellect. As slavery to social conventions gave way to individualism and individualism to nationalism, nationalism would in the last resort give way to universal creative unity. To the monotheistic faith he received from his father, Debendranath Tagore, he added the essence of all great religions of India—Buddhism, Vaishnavism and medieval mysticism—and he held Christ in high regard. This widening of horizon was consonant with India's historical experiences through the ages. It was so catholic that Gora (the hero of one of his early novels), the son of an Irish gentleman, found the true meaning of Hinduism not in the esoteric orthodoxy of his foster father but in the all-embracing affection of Anandamoyee and Paresh babu. Tagore's poetry drew inspiration from all cultures of India—Vyāsa and Vālmiki, Kālidāsa and Chandidas, Kabir and Nanak, and yet did not spurn the great romantic poets of England or the thoughts of Yeats, Bergson, Duhamel, Romain Rolland and Maeterlinck. More, Tagore discovered Asia for us. Chinese craft, Japanese painting and Balinese dance drama were copiously drawn upon and mixed with art forms of all parts of India at Santiniketan. His music took from Italian



opera as easily as from Hindusthani or South Indian classical style. His choreography blended Manipuri steps with Candyen and Bharatnatyam *mudras* with Kathakali *abhinyaya*. At the ripe old age of seventy he dared to paint in a highly individual style.<sup>41</sup> He was a universal mind, at home in all cultures. He had what T. S. Eliot prized most in a poet, the historical sense, and he wrote not merely with his own generation in his bones but with a feeling that all the arts of Asia have a simultaneous existence and composed a simultaneous order. This "sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together" made him the greatest traditional and the greatest revolutionary poet of India. He believed in interchangeability of forms; his poems can be sung and songs read well as poetry and both possess a wealth of imagery worthy of the finest plastic arts. He created the ideal and realised in fact for us what Diaghilev called "the World of Art." From his stand point all his activities are only part of an undivided and ceaseless quest for self-realisation through manifold contact with the world and life.

He was a European in industry and enterprise though the latter's materialism he abhorred and machine he feared. Concerned not only with welfare but with man's eternal and indomitable urge for self-expression, more with beauty than with utility, he saw danger in the cults of matter and power. His refined poetic sensibility, rebelled against its products—quantitative calculus, imperialism and war. That he was an Indian had much to do with such reaction but he condemned evil committed not only by the Englishman but also by the Japanese or the German or even the Indian. He hailed the Russian revolution as a "Miracle" but did not fail to perceive there potential collectivist pressure on free development of human personality.

Profound, abundant, vital, intimate with nature without being a pagan, mystic, yet very much of this world, believing in a personality at once concrete and universal, Tagore's life itself was an art. God appeared before him not as Majesty and Truth but as infinite manifestations of *Rupa* in sight, sound and spirit, which gave eternal joy. Convinced that he and his God were engaged in an everlasting play of the lovers, he discarded asceticism for a fullness of life. But he would not abandon himself to the supreme lover wholly like the Vaishnava mystic. God has as much need of man for His self-realisation as man of Him. He was not only the Father and the Lover but the King. The concept of Jibandevata—a Diety of Life by whose help he could bind in one whole the broken chords of action and expression and evoke the Infinite within the Finite—is unique among India's myriad concepts of Godhead.

Professor Tarak Nath Sen has strongly refuted the notion that 'Tagores' poetry would not have been what it is but for English romantic poetry. His *Urvashi* has an analogue in Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* as *Varshasesh* has one—in *Ode to the West Wind*. But on closer analysis we find the poems to be different. Keats also, according to



Professor Sen, has not given him any style or slant or attitude but a particular form of verse—"the run on and enjambed rhymed couplet where the rhymes are so swamped by the modulated overflow of sense and rhythm from line to line that the couplets read almost like blank verse". He finds in Tagore "the same note of profound acceptance as in Shakespeare" or Goethe but no influence of modern English poetry or the French symbolist movement. The style of his later poetry does not derive from the post-Georgian English verse. "He had evolved his symbols and their patterns (which derive mostly from the Indian scene and the Indian tradition) long before the influence of that movement had reached this country". Prof. Sen even denies the impact of Bergson on the philosophy of *Balākā*, and relates it to the Upanishadic injunction চরৈবেতি.<sup>42</sup>

Is it necessary to be so aggressively categorical? No one has yet comprehended the mysterious chemistry of creation and how different thoughts, even alien thoughts, and imageries fuse together in it without leaving a trace of their differentiated states. Tagore could never take crudely. And to say that he had not enriched the inherited tradition with Western inspiration is to deny the universality of his mind and to leave unexplained his repeated sojourns in the West. Professor Church has drawn our attention to the curious affinity between his later work and the rhythm of the seventeenth century English prose which he read with Henry Morley at University College, London. Many novels of Tagore are European in temper. No one, unfamiliar with European psychological novels, could write *Chaturanga*, *Chokher Bāli*, *Ghare Bāire* and *Yogāyog*. Binodini is not Kundanandini and Dāmini is not Saibalini though both pass through a process of sublimation in the Indian way. When we compare a single poem of Tagore like 'Urvasi' with one of Shelley like 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' their dissimilarities strike at once, but can one deny the Keatsian and Shelleyan atmosphere of *Mānasi*, *Sonār Tari* and *Chitrā*? The supernatural element of 'Sindhupare' of *Chitrā* has much more of Keat's 'Eve of St. Agnes' than anything Indian. Does not 'Swapna' (*Kalpna*) evoke Browning's 'Love among the Ruins'? No doubt the Upanishads enjoin চরৈবেতি but the image of the flowing river in *Balakā* is essentially Bergsonian and the two concepts may have fused. The king of *Arup Ratan* is an Indian symbol, pervaded throughout by Vaishnava mysticism, but the post office of *Dākghar*, the machine of *Muktadhārā*, the fortress of *Achalāyatan* and the underground labyrinth and net of *Raktakarabi* are definitely Maeterlinckian. May not the cave of *Chaturanga* be taken as the symbol of the subconscious?

The following is a correlation of his foreign tours and the distinct outbursts of creation which accompanied or succeeded them :

First foreign tour (1878-80)	<i>Balmiki Pratibha</i> (1880-81)
Third foreign tour (1912-13)	<i>Dākghar</i> and <i>Achalāyatan</i> (1912)



Fourth foreign tour (1916-17)	{ <i>Balāka</i> (1914-16)
	{ <i>Chaturanga, Fālguni, Ghare Bāire</i> (1916)
Fifth foreign tour (1920-21)	<i>Muktadhāra</i> (1922)
Sixth foreign tour (1924)	{ <i>Purabi</i> (1924-25)
Seventh foreign tour (1924-25)	{ <i>Rakta Karabi</i> (1923-26)
Tenth foreign tour (1929)	<i>Yogāyoga, Sesher Kavitā, Tapati, Mahuā</i> (1929)
Twelfth foreign tour (1931)	<i>Parishesh, Punascha</i> (1931)

It will be seen from the table given above that three turning points of his poetic career, *Balakā*, *Purabi* and *Punascha* took place during or after a foreign tour and the same may be said of some of his famous novels and dramas. I do not want to labour this point or to minimise the significance of the Indian tradition and his own native genius which was the catalytical agent. I merely point out an important factor which might have lent a new vigour or a new angle of vision to his creative activity. I shall not be surprised if this was one of the sources of his unbedimmed youth.

By now I have looked far beyond the nineteenth century and should trace my way back to the immediate inspiration of Viharilal Chakraborty, our first subjective lyric poet. Tagore has compared him to a solitary bird filling the silent sky of dawn with a note all its own. He did not imitate the epic style of Madhusudan or Nabin Sen nor seek refuge in mythology or patriotism, all too common at his time. He sang nostalgically of nature, of a simple life in an unsophisticated village, of ancient ruins far from the madding crowd, of the infinite ocean breaking thunderously upon the shore. The *Sāradāmangal* introduced into Bengali poetry the incurable sadness of a romantic, at odds with his environment and seeking for a strange and beautiful world.

His muse, *Sāradā*, is romantic imagination which  
 "Is but another name of absolute power  
 And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
 And Reason in her most exalted mood."  
 She is his mother, lover and daughter.

She is

"Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate  
 with thine own house all thou dost shine upon  
 Of human thought or form."

He passes through all the moods of love—parting, doubt, despair and joy of reunion with his Muse. Looked upon as mere love poetry it is superb occasionally in emotional intensity and musical phrasing.

Tagore came into his own in 'Nirjharer Swapna Bhanga' or the Awakening of the Fountain (1882). He describes the miracle that inspired it in *Jiban Smriti*. He had already written several narratives and dramas



in verse but those were what he called the circumambulation in the forest of the heart. Like the pent-up fountain, lost in the darkness of a cave, he ultimately breaks upon the world of reality. *Kadi O Komal* (1886) throbs with the passion of youth and contains some of his most sensuous sonnets. But passion palls and fancy captures the poet once again. *Manasi* (1890), *Sonar Tari* (1894) and *Chitra* (1896) have a unity of spirit. In the rose-swept Ghazipore or on the wide expanse of the Padma and its soft-trilling tributaries, on silent islands and in sleepy villages, the poet dreams of his *mānas sundari*, his *Epipsychidon* :

"By Love, of light and motion : One intense  
Diffusion, one serene omnipresence

She is the veiled glory of this lampless universe, the moon beyond the clouds, the star above the storm, the

".....mirror  
in whom, as in the splendour of the Sun,  
All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on !"

He reveals himself as our finest nature poet. Not for nothing does he evoke again and again scenes and lines and sounds from Kālidāsa. The cloud messenger (*Meghaduta*) liberates him from the close, dim home to wander from strange land to stranger where he feels one with the love-lorn souls of all times and climes. 'Ahalya' is no longer an inert stone but feels in the depths of her being the cares of mother earth and the stampede of life through the ages. The indomitable wind beats its myraid wings and the sky and the sea reel together in a vast confusion. In some of his poems like 'Swarga Haite Vidaya,' 'Yete Nāhi Diba' and 'Basu dharā' he becomes one with the earthly nature. He wants to absorb the world into himself through his senses, and unsatisfied, desires a physical contiguity such as plants have with the earth.

*Sonar Tari* introduces a new motif in his poetry—Jiban Devata—which for a time dominates his work. It is the unifying force of creation. It is writing the poetry of his life with all the good and evil in him. It not only binds the scattered fragments of this life into one whole but it has made him evolve through aeons of variegated existence into the present being. It is there in his unconscious, upholding the collective consciousness of previous existences. The idea has a double strand : the Vaishnava dualism of God and man wooing each other and the Upanishadic monism of God, the ground reality of all. 'Niruddes Yātrā,' 'Jiban Devatā,' 'Chitrā' and 'Sindhupāre' belong to this category. Unencumbered by metaphysics, 'Niruddes Yātrā' has turned out to be one of our finest lyrics. The romantic supernaturalism of 'Sindhupāre' reminds one of Keats. 'Urvasi,' Tagore's Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, stands apart. Urvasi is not merely the heavenly dancer of Indian myth. She is beauty dissociated from all human



relationships, the cosmic spirit of life in eternal dance. She is also that world-enchancing love which moves the sun and the stars. The seventh stanza evokes Botticelli's Birth of Aphrodite, where she rises on the crest of primal waves, a glorious nude, dripping with the salty brine and the desire-laden gaze of the universe. In Thompson's words, "This is meeting of East and West indeed, a tangle of Indian mythology, modern science, legends of European romance."

Many of *Kalpanā's* love poems can be sung. 'Swapna' takes us to the far off Ujjain. The lovers stand face to face in a silent, mysterious city and weep silently as they have forgotten the language in which they made love in the past. There are two pieces on Kāma, the god of Love, one before and one after his death. Tagore takes up the mythological story of Kama's destruction by Siva's anger and gives it a new twist. The ashes of the bodiless god are scattered in the four winds and carried every where. Instead of destroying love, Siva has recreated him in myriad forms, in an all-pervasive presence. 'Varshashesh' would have been a masterpiece if it had not dragged. But its music is superb. It rises in a crescendo like the storm itself to a pitch, where the poet hears in it the clarion call of action and, if need be, of death, where he can drown the petty trials and tribulations of an empty, fragmented life. As the storm dies down, the music falls till in the silence after the storm the peace of a resurrection is conveyed. 'Vaisakh' deals with the same mood, though the image of Siva has given it novelty and the Sanskrit diction a rolling.

Tagore wrote his best stories in this period. If some of his poems signified a desire to withdraw, the stories compensated for them by a constant return to "the human condition". In fact, Tagore was alternatively the skylark of Shelley and the skylark of Wordsworth. In his poems he flies higher and higher into the blue deep while in his stories he comes down nearer and nearer to the nest—thus keeping close to the kindred points of heaven and home. The stories catch the reality at its rawest and at its simplest. No one before him has seen rural Bengal with such observing eyes or delineated its joys and sorrows with such sympathy and tenderness. He puts them in the vast perspective of nature and thereby gives them a universal significance they seem never to have possessed before. They are small but not trivial. They are the quintessence of man's basic desires and hopes, frustrations and failures. Ratan's desolation in *Postmaster*, Kabuliwala's affection for Mini in *Kābuliwālā*, Gribala's quiet love for Sashi in *Megh O Raudra*, Tarapada's supreme non-attachment in *Atithi* or Nilkanta's feelings for Kironmoyee in *Apad* assume a value which is eternal and a grandeur which marries earth with heaven. Supernaturalism plays an effective role in some stories like *Nisithe*, *Kshudita Pasan* and *Manihara*. Tagore does not burke unconventional relations or emotions and shows a mastery of psychology in depicting them, as for example in *Nastanid*. Nor does he idealise humanity. Many of his stories deal with greed or love of power, jealousy or complex of a mother-in-law. Each is a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of life.



Tagore developed quickly as a novelist. His first novel, *Bau Thākuranir Hāt* (1883), shows little promise but *Rajarshi* (1887) is important for the character of Raghupati as well as for its theme—struggle between church and state. *Chokher Bāli* (1903) finds a mature Tagore, master of the form of fiction. Though he is manipulating a theme, similar to that of Bankim, *viz.* the passion of a young widow, his characterization marks a sharp departure from the latter's tradition. Binodini is not a tender Kunda, bowed before the flings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but an irresistible life-force bravely defying them in a desperate bid for happiness here and now. Mahendra is a pampered Bengali youth, tied to the apron string of his mother before marriage and doting on his wife afterwards. His infatuation with Asha rouses an intense jealousy in Rajlakshmi, his mother, who practically sets up Binodini, the young widow, as a rival. In the battle for possession the sophisticated Binodini wins. Scene after scene are redolent with sensuous images and associations and the desire of Binodini shears through them like fire which consumes Mahendra. But she is fed up with Mahendra who brings her nothing more than sex. She wants some one to adore, to worship, to sacrifice herself to, and not merely to quench the urge of her body. This attraction and repulsion have been handled with such magnificent skill and restraint that the end, where Binodini finds her hero in Behari and sublimates her passion, does not shock us.

In the 19th century Tagore had not yet found his *forte* in symbolism. He wrote a few musicals and verse dramas of which *Raja O Rani*, *Bisarjan* and *Malini* alone stand out. *Bisarjan* deals with the theme of *Rajarshi* and reads better as drama for the outer conflict between Raghupati and Govindamanikya and the inner conflict of Jaysinha are essentially dramatic in character. *Malini* is remarkable for the inner conflict of Supriya, placed between his love for Malini and his loyalty to Kshemankar, and of the heroine herself, placed between Supriya and Kshemankar, to both of whom she feels attracted. In one she sees tender love and in the other, genius and manliness to fulfil it. In *Raja O Rani* Bikram wants to forget the responsibilities of a king in one endless blissful union while Sumitra, like his conscience, resists his irresponsible passion. To her it is artificial and unbalanced and she is sure that it will die by its sheer violence and insensitivity. The drama ends like the two others mentioned above, in a Shakespearean tragedy. Its later adaptation, *Tapati*, is more mature because, in tune with the Indian tradition, it ends not in Bikrama's heart-rending anguish, but in peace that descends on the merging of all futilities in an unperceived harmony (magnificently evoked by verses from the *Ishā Upanishad*).

#### REFERENCES

1. It was the polyglot Madhusudan Dutt who established our first contact with the Renaissance Italy. He read Tasso in original (Nagendra Nath Shome, *Madhu Smriti*, p. 612) and imitated the Petrarchan measure in his Sonnets



(ibid., p. 276). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was impressed by the civilization of the Italian Renaissance and hoped for a 'new birth' of Bengal *a la* Medici Florence (Haraprasad Shastri, 'Bankim Chandra Kānthālipārāya', *Nārāyan, Bankim Smṛiti Sankhya*, Vaisakh, 1322 B.S.). He found its parallel in the revival of philosophy, logic and literature in the 15th century Bengal ('Banglar Itihas sambandhe Kayekti Katha', *Bangadarshan*, Agrahayan, 1287 B.S.). In describing the Bengal of his time Keshab Chandra Sen used the term 'renaissance' as well as the adjective of its Bengali equivalent, 'nabajāgarita'. The conscious comparison between Bengal's cultural activities in the 19th century and the Italian or the English renaissance began with the emergence of extremism in politics. Bipin Chandra Pal's estimate of Rammohun as its pioneer (1901) was followed by Sibsanath Shastri's *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj* (Dec. 1903). The young Rabindranath wrote essays on Dante and Petrarca for *Bharati* (1878) but he considered western literature and thought to be more intoxicating than nourishing for our appetite (*Jiban Smṛiti*, 1318-19 B.S.). Andrews used the term in the title of a book (*The Renaissance in India*), published in 1912. The concept received the unqualified blessing of Acharya Jadunath Sarkar: "It was truly a Renaissance, wider, deeper, and more revolutionary than that of Europe after the fall of Constantinople." (*The History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Dacca, 1948, p. 498). Amit Sen (S. C. Sarkar) would not go so far but still held, "The role played by Bengal in the modern awakening of India is thus comparable to the position occupied by Italy in the story of the Italian Renaissance". Atul Chandra Gupta, in his introduction to *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (The National Council of Education, Jadavpur, 1958), protested against this "facile comparison and analogy" but the title itself betrays the prevalent view. In a recent work on Vidyasagar Benoy Ghosh compares Calcutta with the fifteenth century Florence. Dr. R. C. Majumdar and Dr. K. K. Datta both use the terms Renaissance and Renascent with regard to India.

2. Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (German edn. August, 1860). The select bibliography of Renaissance studies since 1860 fills 47 pages of Federico Chabod's *Machiavelli and the Renaissance* (Lond., 1958) and is daily growing. Some of the major reassessments are :
  - (a) W. K. Fergusson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (Camb. Mass, 1948), "The Interpretations of the Renaissance: Suggestions for a Synthesis", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII (1951), pp. 483-95.
  - (b) Hans Baron, *New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. I (Camb. 1957), "Towards a more positive evaluation of the Fifteenth Century Renaissance", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, IV (1943), pp. 27-49, also ibid., XIX (1958), pp. 31-34.
  - (c) Denys Hay, *The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background* (Camb., 1961).
  - (d) John Huizinga, *Men and Ideas* (Meridian, 1959), pp. 243-309.
  - (e) P. O. Kristeller, *The Classics and Renaissance Thought* (Camb., Mass, 1955), *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome, 1956).
  - (f) E. Cassirer, 'Some Remarks on the question of the originality of the Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, IV (1943), pp. 54-55.
  - (g) R. S. Lopez & H. A. Miskimin, "The Economic Depression of the Renaissance", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Series, April, 1962, pp. 408-26.
  - (h) E. Panofsky, "Renaissance of Renaissance", *The Kenyon Review*, VI (1944), pp. 234-35.
3. There were only 1,396 medical students and 1,187 engineering students in India in 1911.



4. In 1827 none employed in the Judicial and Revenue Departments received a monthly salary above Rs. 250 per month (£300 a year). In 1849 only 277 persons were entitled to that scale, while 1,173 got between £120 and £240 and 1,147 between £24 and £120. Part Papers 11 (110C), H. L., 1852; Rep. Select Committee, H. C., 1852-53, app. 3, p. 343; Return for 1857, Parl. Papers. 42 (201 VI), 1857-58. In 1873 the number of Indians on Rs. 100/ or over a month was 4,039. (C.R.O. Eur. Hss E 218, 23/1, F65). In 1903 Curzon estimated the number of Indians at salaries exceeding Rs. 75/- per month to be 16,000.
5. P. B. Coll. 220, p. 57, table 6 (C.R.O., Condition of the Lower Classes in India: reports on Govt. of India's confidential investigation, 1888).
6. For syllabus taught at Hindu College in 1843, see Rajnarayan Basu, *Atmā Charit* (3rd edn.), pp. 28-29. For his B.A. (1858) Bankim read *Macbeth*, Dryden's *Cymon and Iphigenia*, Addison's *Essays*. "The literature of the West", wrote Lord Hardinge to Queen Victoria, "is the most favourite study among the Hindoos in their schools and colleges. They will discuss with accuracy the most important events in British history. Boys of 15 years age, black in colour, will recite the most favourite passages from Shakespeare, ably quoting the notes of the English and German commentators." Hardinge to Victoria, 23 Nov. 1845. In 1834 we find Madhusudan playing the role of Gloucester in *Henry VI* at the prize distribution ceremony of Hindu College. (B. N. Banerjee, *Sambad Patre Sekaler Katha*, vol. 2, pp. 19-20).
7. Rabindranath, *Jiban Smriti* (3rd edn.), p. 100.
8. Madhusudan Dutt to Gourdas Basak, 18 August 1849.
9. The motto of *Debi Chaudhurāni* was taken from Comte's *Catechism of Positive Religion* but the training given to the heroine was from the *Gita*. The headings of *Kapāl Kundala's* chapters are accompanied by quotations from Shakespeare, Byron, Kalidasa, Harsha, Vidyapati and Michael, exhibiting the wide range of Bankim's reading.
10. Tarak Nath Sen, *Rabindra Nath Tagore, A Centenary Volume 1861-1961*, pp. 252-53.
11. "Our social and moral developments are of a different character," wrote Michael apologetically to Rajnarayan Basu. "We are no doubt actuated by the same passions, but in us those passions assume a milder shape."
12. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (2nd edn.) Vol. I, p. 138.
13. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. D. K. Biswas and P. Ganguli, p. 99.
14. Rammohun Roy to John Digby (circa 1816/17), *ibid.*, pp. 71-72.
15. D. K. Biswas, 'Rammohun Rayer Dharmamat O Tantra shastra', *Visva-bharati Patrika*, Vaisakh-Asarh, 1882 saka, pp. 225-48.
16. Debendranath Tagore, *Atmajibani* (4th edn., 1962), Parisishta, 45-46.
17. Debendranath to Rajnarayan Basu (Mussoorie), 4th Jaistha, 1288 B.S.
18. In this connection see Bankim's review of Rajnarayan Basu's *Hindu Dharmer Sreshthata*, *Bangadarsan*, Chaitra, 1272 B.S., pp. 571-76; Bankim's controversy with Rabindranath, 'Adi Brahmasamaj O Naba Hindu Sampradaya' *Prachar*, Agrabayan, 1291 B.S., pp. 169-84; 'Chittasuddhi', *Prachar*, Falgun, 1292 B.S.; 'Debatattva O Hindu Dharma', *Prachar*, Vols 1-2. On Bankim's religious attitude the most comprehensive essay is by the author of this chapter, *Bankimchandra and Extremist Thought*, *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. LXXXIV part II, July-Dec. 1965 and Vol. LXXXV, part I, Jan.-June, 1966.
19. Bankimchandra, 'Hindu Dharma Sambandhe Kayekti Sthula Katha', *Prachar*, Vol. 2, pp. 78-80.



20. Bankim always lays stress on Srikrishna's humanity and historicity.  
 "কৃষ্ণচরিত্র মনুষ্যচরিত্র । ঈশ্বর লোকহিতার্থে মনুষ্যচরিত্র গ্রহণ করিয়াছিলেন ।"  
 Bankimchandra to Srischandra Majumdar, 10 Oct. 1885.
21. Bankimchandra, 'Bange Debapuja', *Bhramar*, Agrahayan, 1281 B.s.; pp. 181-87.
22. Rabindranath Tagore brought about a synthesis of Infinite and Finite (*Asambhuti* and *Sambhuti*), between whom he saw an eternal play going on. He even dared to call them interdependent. Rabindranath's religion of man speaks of *Jivan devata* who is *Bhuma* but *Manabik bhuma*. To realise Him one must look within and, when realised, He will be seen present in all men. *Yé purushé Brahmabiduste Biduh Paramesthinam* (Atharva Veda).
23. For a different view see R. C. Majumdar, *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Cal. 1960) and *The British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, II, pp. 32-33. He has not been able to rebut the influence of Rammohun on Dewan Baidyanath Mukherjee, who prompted Sir Edward Hyde East to call the meeting that resolved on the foundation of the Hindu College. Mukherjee was a close associate of Rammohun and a member of his Atmiya Sabha. See in this connection, B. N. Banerji, "Rammohun Roy as an Educational Reformer", Vol. XVI, pt. II, pp. 154-75, Jogesh Ch. Bagal, "The Origin of the Hindu College", *Presidency College Centenary Volume* (1956), pp. 299-305.
24. Rabindranath, 'Kabi Sangeet' *Loka Sāhitya*; S. K. De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century (1757-1857)* (2nd edn., 1962), chapt. X.
25. Ramram Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra* (1801); Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya, *Maharaja Krishna Chandra Rayasya Charitram* (1805); Mrityunjoy Vidyalanekar, *Rajābali* (1808).
26. Mrityunjoy Vidyalanekar, *Batris Simhāsan* (1802); Golaknath Sarma, *Hitopodesa* (1801); Tarinicharan Mitra, *Oriental Fabulist* (1803); Chandicharan Munshi, *Totā Itihasa* (1805).
27. Rammohun Roy, *Prārthānāpatra* (1823) and *Anusthān* (1829).
28. Bankimchandra, *Iswar Chandra Gupter Jibancharit O Kabita*.
29. Madhusudan Dutt to Gourdas Basak, quoted in Nagendra Nath Shome, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
30. J. D. Bethune to Gourdas Basak, 20 July 1849, Jogindra Nath Basu, *Jiban Charit* (4th edn.), pp. 159-60.
31. "Let those who feel that they have springs of fresh thought in them, fly to their mother tongue." Madhusudan Dutt to Gourdas Basak, 26 Jan. 1865. Also the famous sonnet 'He Banga bhandare taba, etc.'
32. Madhusudan Dutt to Gourdas Basak, 18 August 1849.
33. Madhusudan Dutt to Rajnarayan Basu, 15 May 1860.
34. The derivation of it from "an erotic symbology, of battle" (Bishnu Dey, 'Michael Madhusudan Datta', *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, op. cit.) seems to be far-fetched.
35. Dipti Tripathi, 'Ovider āloké Virāṅganā, *Adhunātan*, second selection, 1366 B.S.
36. Madhusudan Dutt to Rajnaryan Basu, 7 Sept. 1860, same to Gourdas Basak, 26 Jan. 1865.
37. S. B. Dasgupta, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, op. cit., p. 265.
38. Denys Hay, op. cit., p. 8.
39. P.O. Kristeller, op. cit., p. 10.
40. See Int. to *Rājsinha* and *Sitārām*, Sahitya Parishad edn.
41. "My pictures are my versification in lines. If by chance they are entitled to claim recognition it must be primarily for some rhythmic significance of form which is ultimate, and not for any interpretation of an idea, or representation of a fact". *Tagore Memorial Special Supplement, Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, p. 29.
42. Taraknath Sen, op. cit., pp. 260-61, p. 273.



## BENGALI WRITING IN ENGLISH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### (I)

Until Job Charnock and his men had settled down at the swamp-girt village of Chuttannutty in the last decade of the seventeenth century, there was hardly any occasion for the Bengali to use the English language as a medium of expression, far less to use it for creative purposes. We have no documentary evidence to indicate how in those early days Britons and Bengalis communicated with each other, but we shall not perhaps be far out of truth if we imagine that the initial language of gesture soon yielded place to a verbal mode of communication, rather crude and clumsy, but nevertheless serviceable, based on a set of essential glossary and limited syntax. Throughout the eighteenth century, such an interlingual contact grew in both volume and depth; the demand for some training in the English language for Bengalis increased in both depth and volume and the demand was utilitarian rather than cultural. During the *fin-de-siecle* decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, there was quite a crop of schools where Bengali boys could pick up some English. Pyarichand Mitra (pen-name, Tekchand Thakur) begins the fourth chapter of his novel, *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1855) with a paragraph that describes the early days of these schools:

When the British first came to Calcutta to carry on trade, the mercantile profession was in the hands of the baboos of Sett and Basak families, but there was none in Calcutta who knew the English language. Negotiations of trade with Englishmen used to be conducted by means of gestures. Necessity, however, is the mother of invention, and within a short period, the local people began to learn English. When presently the Supreme Court came to be established, the cultivation of English too grew. In those days, Ramram Misra and Anandiram Das learnt a good deal of spoken English. Ramram Misra's pupil Ramnarain Misra, a lawyer's clerk, used to draft petitions for many litigants; he ran a school where the pupils had to pay monthly fees of Rs. 14 to Rs. 16. At a later time, Ramlochan Napit, Krishnamohan Basu and many others took up the pedagogue's profession. The boys read Thomas Dyce and memorized meanings of words. A youngster who, at a wedding function or a dinner party, could rattle forth compound words, became a much-admired cynosure of the gathering. Following Franco and Arratoon Petres, Mr. Sherbourne too started a school which was attended by boys of wealthy and respectable families. (*My translation.*)

The story of schooling in English in Bengal is an integral part of the story of modern education in Bengal and India. Contemporary records



(such as Ramcomal Sen's *A Dictionary of English and Bengali*, 1834, and extracts from newspapers collected in the two volumes of W. H. Carey's *The Good Old Days of Hon'ble John Company*, (1882) mention schools set up in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth, by Archer, Farrell, Drummond, Sherbourne, Browne, Martin Bowles, Cunningham, Halifax, Lindstedt, Draper, Mackinon, Arratoon Petrus, Franco, Yates, Furly, Gaynard and one Rev. Mr. Holmes. "Every Englishman," it has been said,<sup>1</sup> "in straitened circumstances—the broken-down soldier, the bankrupt merchant and the ruined spendthrift—set up a day school." There were schools run by Bengalis too—Gour Mohan Addy's school made a name for itself and Sherbourne who had a Bengali mother, considered himself a Bengali—and if some of the pedagogues were passing adventurers, others (such as Drummond and Cunningham) proved themselves to be excellent and inspiring teachers. Some of these schools—Drummond's Academy in particular—organized recitations, debates, stage performances of scenes from Shakespeare, thus communicating a sense of literary excellence to the students many of whom were Bengali boys.<sup>2</sup> Already, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, several plays of Shakespeare were staged in Calcutta and there was quite a spate of Shakespeare performances during the first quarter of the nineteenth.<sup>3</sup>

Presently, the efforts of Rammohun Ray, Radhakanta Dev, David Hare and others to organize and disseminate 'English' education; the establishment of the Hindu College on 20 January, 1817; and the inspiring teaching of that amazing *enfant terrible*, Henry Vivian Louis Derozio, transformed the significance of English for the Bengali from a medium of merely utilitarian communication to a potent vehicle of progressive thought and passion and the Renaissance of Bengal commenced its century-long course. An aspect of this Renaissance was the choice of the English language by some Bengalis as the medium of their creative aspirations.

## (II)

The earliest among the Bengalis (Derozio was a true Bengali and knew the language although English was his mother tongue and he was of Portuguese descent) to write imaginatively in English was Derozio who was born in 1809, the wonderful year that witnessed the birth also of Darwin, Abraham Lincoln, Gladstone, Tennyson and Mendelssohn. His volume of *Poems* was published in Calcutta in 1827, four years before his untimely death, years of turmoil and strenuous struggle for him. For a teen-ager, it was creditable to write as competent verses as Derozio did and the discerning reader will not find these verses notably inferior to the verses of Chatterton and the Great English Romantics written at a comparable age. Charged with a rare intensity of passion and embodied in hardly improvable diction, imagery and rhythm, Derozio's poetry, at its best, impresses one with a sense of fulfilment and maturity astonishing for a man of his age. Had Derozio lived on, his poetry would have, without



doubt, opened itself out to wider and deeper vistas of experience and he might have grown into one of the greatest poets of Bengal, irrespective of the language used. (Jayadeva, the great poet of medieval Bengal, let us remember, wrote in Sanskrit.) The phrase, 'a poet of promise', signifying immaturity, unfulfilment, failure, is unfair to the actual quality of Derozio's poetry; the only justification for using the phrase in the context of Derozio's poetry would be to suggest that this short-lived poet had within him a capacity for yet-untapped complexities of self-development. As it is, his poetry offers us two major themes: a pulsating love of the motherland, and a proud and hopeful confidence in youth, the themes merging into the passion of a total vision of life which has for its sources the modern philosophy of Reason and that defiance of the Caves of Idols which stemmed from Bacon, that profound faith in the equality of man and his right to liberty which characterized the revolutionary urge of late eighteenth century Europe. Consider his well-known sonnet:

My country! in thy day of glory past  
 A beauteous halo circle round the brow,  
 And worshipped as a deity thou wast.  
 Where is that glory, where that reverence now?  
 Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last,  
 And grovelling in the lowly dust are thou!  
 Thy minstrel hath no wreath to weave for thee  
 Save the sad story of thy misery!  
 Well—let me dive into the depths of time,  
 And bring from out the ages that have rolled  
 A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime,  
 Which human eye may never more behold;  
 And let the guerdon of my labour be  
 My fallen country! one kind wish from thee!

This is not *great* poetry but it is assuredly *good* poetry, distinguished by a controlled expression of a strong passion in words that refuse to deck themselves in dispensable rhetorical embellishments. Derozio's name has been linked with Keats's.<sup>4</sup> This class-room parallel is unreal and unnecessary. If at all a British parallel must be found, the Byronic parallel (especially in the diction and rhythm of Derozio's romantic verse-tales such as 'The Fakeer of Jungheera' and 'The Enchantress of the Cave') stares the reader in the face and, as Thomas Edwards maintained years ago in his essay on 'The Poetry of Derozio', the spirit of Philip Sidney and Shelley is not far removed from that of the less known Indian. But let us give every true poet—and who is a true poet if Derozio be not?—the credit of being himself rather than some one else's shadow. In our Father's mansion, there are as many chambers as there are dwellers. This sonnet, like so many others of his poems, is an authentic, underivative poem. Correlated to this theme of patriotism is the theme of confident hope for



the future of the land. In envisioning the burgeoning of the minds of his teen-aged pupils (a few of whom were in fact older than him), Derozio expresses the idealism of all teachers, anticipating the Carlylean concept of the Teacher.

Expanding, like the petals of young flowers ;  
 I watch the gentle opening of your minds,  
 And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds  
 Your intellectual energies and powers,  
 That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)  
 Their wings to try their strength. O how the winds  
 Of circumstances, and freshening April showers  
 Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds  
 Of new perceptions shed their influence ;  
 And how you worship Truth's omnipotence !  
 What joyance rains upon me when I see  
 Fame in the mirror of futurity,  
 Weaving the chaplets you are yet to gain,  
 And then I feel I have not lived in vain.

Whatever his stature, Derozio was the first poet of modern Bengal, and a true poet. In the works of the next Bengali poet to come out in print, Kashiprasad Ghosh (1809-1873), there may be some minor accomplishments but there is hardly any genuineness of poetry. His *The Shair, and other poems* (1830) was noticed in several contemporary literary journals<sup>5</sup> of Britain including the influential *The New Monthly Magazine* (June, 1831, p. 253) and the *Athenaeum* (1831, p. 382). The *Fraser's Magazine* (November, 1834, p. 608) referred thus to Kashiprasad :

We may particularly notice the picture of that amazingly clever lad, Khasiprasad—Ghosh [sic], the Hindoo poet, whose poem in honour of the Gold River (Ganges) appears not only in *Fisher's Scrap Book*, but in Tom Roscoe's *Oriental Annual*. Khasiprasad ought therefore to feel much honoured. We are told he is a very excellent and worthy young fellow, who drinks brandy pawnee as orthodoxically as if he were a Christian.

The supercilious pat-on-the-back of this coarse witticism continues in many British reviews of much later Indo-English poetry. However, Kashiprasad's principal merit lies in the historical fact that he was the first Bengali-speaking person to have written verses in English. He was soon followed by Rajnarain Dutt (1824-1889), the author of the unadmirable *Osmyn, an Arabic Tale* (1841), a Byronic verse-tale.

### (III)

To these early days of Bengali Writing in English, belongs the first (and for a long time, the solitary) English drama written by a Bengalee,



*The Persecuted* (1831) by Krishna Mohan Banerjea, a product of the Hindu College, a Derozian, a Christian convert and afterwards the Reverend. It is a play in stilted prose, quite obviously and even flagrantly motivated, based partly on the author's own experiences of conflict with orthodox Hindu neighbours, presenting insufficient action and wooden characterization, lacking in dramatic tension. *The Persecuted* nevertheless deserves a place in a chronicle of Bengal as the earliest evidence of the fact that in a changing social pattern, the Bengali's instinct for dramatization of a social situation found an adequate form in the English rather than in the indigenous drama.

Another first was a work of fiction—the first novel ever written by a Bengali in his own language or English—entitled *A Journal of Forty-eight Hours of the year 1945*, written by Kylash Chunder Dutt, Toru's uncle, published in D. L. Richardson's *Calcutta Literary Gazette* of 6 June, 1835.<sup>6</sup> This is truly a novel, unlike several previous English works written by Bengalis, re-telling old stories, such as *A Selection of Tales from Persian* (1816) by Mohunpersaud Thakoor, *Beauties from the Arabian Nights* (1816) by Ramtanoo Gongoley, and *A Tale 3,000 Years Old* (1834), Richardson's *Bengal Annual and Literary Keepsake* by Two Collegians. Kylash Chunder's novel envisages an armed uprising of Bengalis against oppressive British rule a century ahead in 1945; the rebellion, led by the hero Bhubanmohan, is too soon put down. The plot is thin and the characterization superficial, but the author's ability to tell a story is beyond question, nor is there anything derivative in the conception and construction of the story. Another work of fiction on a similar theme and similarly forward-looking was *The Republic of Orissa: annals from the pages of the twentieth century* by Shoshee Chunder Dutt, also of the Dutt family, published in the *Saturday Evening's Harkaru* of 25 May, 1845. These novels dealing with the theme of armed rebellion of Indians against the British were followed up many decades later by S. C. Dutt's *Shankur: A Tale of the Mutiny of 1857* (1892) and S. M. Mitra's *Hindupore* (1909).

#### (IV)

The contribution of members of the Dutt family to Indian Literature in English was mostly in poetry. In 1844, the well-known Annual, *Friendship's Offering*, published "Stanzas" by "Baboo Govin Chunder Dutt (A Native of Bengal)". Govin Chunder occasionally wrote colourless verses but never published any volume of his own (unlike several members of the family) and his claim to a place in our chronicle rests principally on the fact that he was the father of the two gifted sisters, Aru Dutt and Toru Dutt. He was also one of the four contributors to that interesting collection of verses, *The Dutt Family Album*, which was published in 1870 in England. The volume contains 183 pieces, assembled without any sense of plan and sequence, plus a poem entitled 'A Counter-



Meditation (Appendix)', presumably a last-minute insertion, stimulated perhaps by the poem 'The Heavens (Written in Auberlen's "Divine Revelation", pp. 92-94).' There are as many as 68 sonnets in the volume, following both the Italian and the English structural patterns,—a fact that, along with the predilection for the form that we notice in Derozio and in the English verses of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, indicates the popularity of the form among the Bengali students of European poetry and furnishes a background to Michael's transplantation of the form into Bengali. Besides the sonnets, there are, as may be expected in a volume of very minor verse of those days, several ballad-like pieces of a historical-romantic nature, jogging along the dusty road of the heavily-trodden rhythm and diction of the Scott-Byron school of verse-narratives, pieces such as 'Samarsi,' 'Jehangir's Lament', 'The Death of Mahmud Ghorī', 'The Chief of Pokerna', and 'The Maid of Roopnagore'; the last piece anticipates Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's treatment in *Rajsinha* of the story of the princess of the small Rajput state of Roop Nagar who spurned Aurangzeb's offer to marry her. (These ballad-like poems, resorting occasionally to Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, partly furnish a background to the historical novels in Bengali of Ramesh Chunder Dutt and Tagore's poems on Rajput legends). There are a few *vers d'occasion* pieces but several verses are commonplace paraphrases of Biblical texts or are inspired by pious European authors. These Bengali poets are plainly out to exhibit their Christian piety; the exception is Omesh Chunder Dutt whose Christianity does not prevent him from composing a 'Hymn to Shiva' and the dramatic monologue of 'The Hindu Wife to her Husband'. The Dutt poets are unabashed admirers of English Romantic and Victorian poetry and one meets such Keatsian echoes as,

(1) Who, on the 'viewless wings of poesy',

Have poured—ah, not in vain—a mighty tide of song. (p. 208)

(2) I see Rebecca by the fountain's side,

Meek Ruth amid the reapers walking slow. (p. 97)

(3) Who hath not seen thee in his chamber still

At dead of night? For me, I've seen thee oft (p. 95)

and such lines as the following which not only employ the 'Locksley Hall' metre but, further, distil the romantic, escapist and rather adolescent spirit of the quartette of poets:

Moorish forts in far Grenada, portals barred and turbans blue,  
Gardens green as blissful Eden, crystal fountains fair to view,  
Divans in the proud Alhambra, fairy mosques of Parian stone,  
Groups of Moors and whiskered Spaniards, tilting round the Soldan's  
throne. (p. 33)



The two other contributors to the *Album*, other than Govin and Omesh, were Greece Chunder whose *Cherry Stones* came out in 1857<sup>7</sup> and Hur Chunder whose two volumes, *Fugitive Pieces* and *Lotus Leaves*, were published in 1851 and 1871 respectively. Another Dutt, Shoshee Chunder, who has been already mentioned as the second Bengali to write a novel, published his poetical volumes, *Stray Leaves* (1864) and *A Vision of Sumeru and other Poems* in 1878. Shoshee Chunder had more intellectual vigour than the other Dutts but to enthuse over the verse of these volumes is to betray a lack of poetic sensibility.

### (V)

The versifying passion of the Dutts reached a rich flowering in the poetry of Toru Dutt, perhaps the best-known Bengali writer of English verse. In understanding certain facets of Toru's genius, it is important to remember the problem of emotional and moral identity that she, a member of a Christian and a carefully anglicized family, felt within the context of the social values of neighbouring Bengali Hindus (as her letters to Miss Martin indicate). One has also to remember the fact that her mother's devoted readings from Bengali epics and Puranas left a deep impress on her mind (as the poem 'Sita' unambiguously indicates). It is necessary to remember further that on her return from Europe, she developed an understanding of some of the higher ethical values of the Indian tradition. And, finally, one has to realize that this young tubercular woman, witnessing the death of her young brother and young sister; watching, fascinated, her own blood-vomits that brought the shadow of death nearer and nearer to her; must have undergone that swift, telescoped psychological maturity, that heightened intensity and energy of intellect and emotion that all talented persons who die early (for example, Keats and Emily Bronte) experience. It is this swift maturity that lends naturalness to Toru's precocity. Her earliest work, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876), contains 166 poems translated from various French poets as well as some notes and appreciations which are an index to her literary tastes. In addition, there is an original French sonnet dedicating the volume to her mother, and another sonnet at the end addressed to her father. Some of the poems read like original works; one of the finest pieces in the collection, a translation of Victor Hugo's 'Morning Serenade', was, till lately, thought to be Toru's work though actually it is Aru's:

Still barred thy doors!—the far east glows,  
the morning wind blows fresh and free,  
Should not the hour that wakes the rose  
Awaken also thee?

After Toru's death in 1877, some of her poems were published in the *Bengal Magazine*; next year, her English novel, *Bianca*, was published



in the same magazine ; in 1879, her French novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, was published in Paris by Didier and evoked the comment of a well-known poet, Madame de Saffray, "She is a French woman in this book, and a French woman like ourselves ! She thinks, she writes, like one of us." Her second book of poems, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, was published in London in 1882 ; meanwhile, two enlarged editions of *A Sheaf* were published in London. Both *Medemoiselle d'Arvers*, the earlier of the two works of fiction, and *Bianca*, are tinged with the young writer's wistful personality, especially in respect of the central event of frustrated love. The French novel is remarkable for its psychological insight ; there is nothing immature and tentative in the presentation of wedded love and maternity although Toru herself did not live long enough to be a married woman and a mother. *Bianca* appears to be an uncompleted draft in which the author is anxious to jot down the outlines of her story rather than fill it up with those subtleties of feeling and thought of which she had proved herself an admirable portrayer in the earlier novel. *Ancient Ballads* is her enduring original work. In several memorable poems of the volume she is concerned with ancient ideals of personal relationship—the ideal wife ('Savitri'), the ideal son ('Sindhu'), the ideal brother ('Lakshman'), and the ideal disciple ('Buttoo', i.e., Ekalavya). 'Jogadhya Uma' is a powerful rendering of a familiar Bengali legend in which Uma, the consort of Shiva, passed herself off as the daughter of the priest of the temple where her image was worshipped. Toru's own readings in Sanskrit as well as her mother's instructions enabled her to perceive the ethical meaning with which many of the ancient legends were charged and she wrote to Miss Martin, "How sublime, how pathetic our legends are !" In *A Sheaf*, Toru had gone through salutary discipline of mastering verse-craft ; in *Ancient Ballads*, she turned from the Western world to her native heritage, her mind enriched however by Western sentiments of democracy and love of liberty. Such a stanza as the following unfolds, no mere promise, but a fulfilment :

Not in seclusion, not apart from all,  
Not in a place elected for its peace,  
But in the heat and bustle of the world,  
'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,  
Must he still labour with a loving soul  
Who strives to enter through the narrow gate.

Toru's minute observation of nature and her tender love for birds and beasts are striking features of her poetry which does not show any wide and complex gamut—but who would demand such a gamut in the poetry of a twenty-year old poet?—but within the limits of her range she is flawless and if we go by Coleridge's wise words, 'poetry, the best words in the best order', Toru is a poet, for she is unquestionably the mistress of the verbal medium of her choice.



## (VI)

With Toru Dutt we are in the third quarter of the nineteenth century rolling on to the fourth ; the story of the Dutts of Rambagan has led us decades ahead of the time when the Derozian flush of Promethean visions was still very much aglow. Let us retrace our steps to the eighteen forties to consider the English works of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Michael's was the strongest genius among Bengali men of letters to have aspired to self-expression in English and to have persisted for some time in that aspiration ; it is not without meaning that the aspiration presently fulfilled itself through the medium of the mother tongue. Madhusudan began writing early, while he was in the Hindu College, and it is important to note that it was as a poet in English and not as a poet in Bengali that he began his career. His poems were published in some of the numerous periodicals of Calcutta in the eighteen thirties—*The Bengal Spectator*, *The Calcutta Literary Gazette*, *Jnananweshan*, *The Gleaner*, *The Blossom*, *The Comet* and so forth—and the young poet wrote facetiously :

Return, before our Monthlies all,  
The 'Gleaner'—'Blossom'—'Comet' tempt  
Me to scribble for them all.

When after conversion, in search of employment, Madhusudan moved on to Madras, he continued to persist in his aspiration, using the pen-names Timothy Penpoem and Disjecta Membra Poeta (a legend taken from Horace). His seven years in Madras produced a good deal of writing in English in both prose (almost entirely journalistic) and verse ; he wrote for the *Madras Circulator and General Chronicle*, *The Athenaeum*, the *Spectator*, *The Hindu Chronicle*, and was for some time connected with the three last-mentioned periodicals in an editorial capacity. *The Captive Ladie* (on the story of Prithwiraj and Sanjookta) and *Visions of the Past* (recalling Biblical figures), his two substantial contributions to English verse, were published originally as parts of a series of poems in the *Madras Circulator* and were afterwards yoked together in book form in 1849. At Madras, he also wrote an unpublished verse-play, *Rizia*, and published a lecture entitled *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu* of which the thesis is indicated by two paragraphs :—

The Hindu, as he stands before you, is a fallen being—once— a green, a beautiful, a tall, a majestic, a flowering tree ; now—blasted by lightning ! Who can recall him to life ?

\* \* \*

It is the glorious mission, I repeat, of the Anglo-Saxon to renovate, to regenerate, or—in one word, to Christianize the Hindu.

On return to Calcutta, Madhusudan undertook and completed several works of translation from Bengali into English : *Ratnavali*, translated in



1858 from Ramnarain Tarkaratna's Bengali translation of the original Sanskrit drama, for purposes of performance on the Belgatchia theatre ; *Sermista*, translated in 1859 from the poet's own Bengali drama for the convenience of the European members of the audience ; *Nil Darpan*, translated in 1861 from the powerful and controversial Bengali play of Dina-bandhu Mitra.

*The Captive Ladie* consists of an Introduction (eleven stanzas of the rhyme scheme, a b a b b, the last line being an Alexandrine) and two tetrametric cantos. The impress of Scott, Byron and Tom Moore (the two latter have provided our poet with mottos for the cantos) is visible on the verses, while there are faint echoes of Keats ("As if his heart's deep fount were burst and overflown!", 'The Upsori') and unconcealed rhythmic effects of Byron's lyrics ("Comest thou as one in beauty's ray"). For one who knows Michael Madhusudan's Bengali verses, it is not possible to take much delight in the imitative, halting, inhibited verses in English. Drinkwater Bethune who read these verses was entirely justified in advising the poet to turn to the mother tongue. Indeed, the proper way to evaluate Michael's English writings is to consider them as some stepping stones to the splendid edifice of his Bengali poetry. It was through the medium of English that Michael acquired his early mastery of the sonnet form and the blank verse (with its enjambment, flexible caesura and stress variation within the foot), learnt the technique of the European epic simile, and also learnt several features of the form of the European epic (e.g., the Invocation, visions, descent into hell, admixture of classical and romantic elements, and so on) and acquired a proper sense of poetic architectonics. During his 'English' period, Michael, like his contemporary Tennyson at Somersby and his predecessor Milton at Horton, was preparing himself for the noble vocation of a poet, reading Tamil, Telegu, Hebrew, Greek, Sanskrit and English and, above all, the great Bengali epics. It was at Madras that he wrote as follows :

Volumes could be written on the glories of Old India—volumes could be written on achievements in love and war of her heroic sons and lotus-eyed daughters. She is indeed an exhaustless mine for the Poet, the Romanticist, the Historian, the Philosopher. But let me pass on—let me turn away my eyes from the dazzling and tempting field—let me close my ears against the syren-music which ravish my soul and softly call me to wander away from the path I am pursuing !

(*The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu*)

Taken objectively, the name of Michael Dutt, the poet in English, is writ in water, but the name of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the poet in Bengali, is engraved indelibly on the perennial memory of his admiring countrymen. The hiatus, in respect of artistic achievement, between Michael's English and Bengali writings is about the same as that between Milton's Latin writings and English writings.



The great name of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is linked up with the theme of Bengali Writing in English in a way comparable to Michael's. Bankim Chandra's very first sally in fiction was in the English medium. His novel *Rajmohan's Wife*, written when he was twenty-seven, completed in 1863, was published serially in 1864 in the weekly periodical, *The Indian Field*, edited by Kishori Chand Mitra. It is a clumsy story of a spirited and pretty woman being married to a rascal, loving a good man whose properties are threatened by robbers in association with his relatives, and, of course, at the end, we have triumph of virtue and downfall of vice. As the editors of the modern edition of this novel have rightly commented, 'Strangely enough, Bengal's first great novelist, like Bengal's first great modern poet, made his debut in the field of literature in the English language.'<sup>8</sup> It is possible to find several *motifs* in *Rajmohan's Wife* which recur in the later Bengali novels, and perhaps the technique of the dialogue is already distinguished for its verve but this morning of an English novel shows the day of the Bengali novels in only the dimmest outline.

## (VII)

The atmosphere and quality of English literature underwent a notable change during the Victorian sunset of the last two decades of the century. There is no tinge of this sunset in most of the Bengali Writing in English of this period. Nobo Kissen Ghose who wrote under the pen-name of Ram Sharma, assiduously published his unpoetical verses (not unoften adulatory verses addressed to British administrators of the country) in numerous magazines between 1878 and 1901, producing, in the meantime, a work in blank verse, *The Last Day* (1886); a musty odour of the diction and rhythm of the feeblest verse of the eighteenth century clings unpleasantly to Nobo Kissen's compositions. Other publications in verse of the period were Maharajah Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore's *Flights of Fancy* (1881); Greece Chunder Dutt's two volumes, *Cherry Stones* (1881) and the companion volume, *Cherry Blossoms* (1887); Gooroo Churun Dutt's *The Loyal Hours* (1886), and Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Lays of Ancient India* (1894), too emphatically reminiscent of Macaulay. As undistinguished as these works of verse are two works of fiction of the period: Kalikrishna Lahiri's *Roshinara* (1881) and H. Dutt's *Bejoy Chand* (1888). Far more interesting, because of their nationalistic slant, are Shoshee Chunder Dutt's novels, *Shankur: A Tale of the Mutiny of 1857* (1884) and *Young Zemindar* (1885). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *The Poison Tree: A Tale of Hindu Life in Bengal* (1884), *Kapal-Kundala* and *Sita Ram* (both 1885) and *Krishna Kanta's Will* (1895), all translations from the original Bengali, indicate, even in their translated form, the wide gap between the contemporary novel in Bengali and the Bengali's novelistic effort in English.

Two distinguished Indian poets writing in English at this time, Manmohan Ghose and Sarojini Naidu, were touched by the aestheticism and



neo-romanticism of the Nineties. Sarojini's is a big name in the recent political history of India, and her parents were Bengali, yet it is not proposed to include her in this chronicle for two reasons. First, though she had begun writing verses in English in the Nineties, and had indeed shown them to Edmund Gosse while she was in England, her first volume of poems, *The Golden Threshold* (1905), does not fall within the nineteenth century. Second, and this is the far more important reason, Sarojini, in spite of her parentage, did not know Bengali nor did she have any identity with Bengali tradition and Bengali values.

Manmohan Ghose who too did not know Bengali, lived however in Bengal and although he pined for the wayside roses of England ('the sweetest country'), he responded throbbingly to the land of his birth and choice. Perhaps the one Bengali (apart from Toru Dutt) for whom English—and no other language—was a natural and authentic medium of poetic construction, Manmohan spoke with the voice of the native Englishman but his poetry bears the stamp of Indian psychology. Manmohan's first publications in book form were in *Primavera* (1890), a joint production of Stephen Philips, Laurence Binyon, Arthur Cripps and our poet whose share entailed five poems out of the total of sixteen; the book published by Blackwell of Oxford ran into a second edition. His second work, *Love Songs and Elegies*, was published in 1898 by Elkin Mathews. He published no other volume during his life time although many poems were included in different journals. The posthumous volume, *Songs of Love and Death* (1926), shows no remarkable variation of mind and art wrought by the passage of a quarter century. For the sad introspective personality of Manmohan Ghose, time seemed very much to have had a stop somewhere in the Nineties when he imbibed—never to deviate from them, his personal experiences rather confirming them—his aestheticist view of life and art, his Virgilian and Parnassian feeling for and employment of words. Manmohan, however, never ceased writing and the manuscripts that he left behind him and which are now in the possession of the University of Calcutta, awaiting some one's devoted and strenuous editorial service (the Mss are clumsy and sometimes appear to be impossible to decipher), contain the draft of *Perseus*, which (when edited and published) should establish Manmohan's reputation as a poet, not of the lyrical imagination alone but of the epic imagination too.

The dominant note of Manmohan's lyrics is elegiac. A *Primavera* poem sets the tone :

In the deep west the heavens grow heavenlier  
 Even after eve : and still  
 The glorious stars remember to appear ;  
 The roses on the hill  
 Are fragrant as before ;  
 Only thy face of all that's dear  
 I shall see never more.



'Never more' has all the poignancy here that Alfred Tennyson and Edgar Allan Poe found in the phrase. In another poem, there is a sense of passion and colour that would have delighted a Leconte de Lisle or Gerard de Nerval :

Heap ruby upon amethyst  
Exhaust the deep seas of their pearl :  
My lips are rosier being kissed  
By the rosy lips of a girl. (Love Songs and Elegies)

And in another poem, we have evidence of the splendid power of manipulating diphthongs and long vowels possessed by this gentle person, 'an exile but in the East and in the West', this lost waif of a Bengali who never found an identity anywhere :

Farewell, sweetest country ; out of my heart, you *roses*,  
Wayside *roses*, nodding, the *slow* traveller to keep.  
Too long have I *drowsed alone* in the *meadows* deep,  
Too long *alone* endured the silence Nature *espouses*.  
This is London. I wake as a sentinel from sleep.

(Italics mine)

The assonant melody of the words in italics of these lines would do credit to the art of a Tennyson or a Swinburne.

### (VIII)

If our balance-sheet for Bengali creative writing in English in the nineteenth century does not indicate any outstanding achievement on the credit side, nothing that can hold its head high in the company of the Bengali prose, verse and drama of the great writers thrown up by our Renaissance, the discrepancy has to be accepted as natural. The creative energy of the nineteenth century must be assessed by its expression in the native language. English could, at best, provide an occasional detour, the high road was indubitably that of the Bengali language. A parallel can be found with Renaissance England. Latin and some other European languages (Italian and Spanish in particular), provided the English imaginative mind with extensive possibilities of experimentation and adaptation and though a Sir Thomas More and a Bacon might use Latin for their metaphysical treatises, no one (not even Bacon himself) would use any other language than English for creative purposes. For law, for diplomacy, for mathematics, Latin was all right, but for the universe of *Faerie Queene*, *King Lear*, *Paradise Lost* and *Religio Medici*, there never was a question of employing any language other than English. The Bengali of the nineteenth century took to English with avidity, of his own accord. He learnt the language well, as well as it is possible to learn an alien language (in spite of the malicious gibes of Kipling and 'Baboo Pitchy



Loll' and other Englishmen of their ilk whose own Hindustanee or, for that matter, French or German, has been notoriously comic). The Bengali wielded the English language with consummate ease and power in ever so many areas of life ; in law, administration, medicine, engineering, the sciences, pedagogy, politics, journalism. The Bengali responded sensitively to the beauty and the glory of English literature, but when it came to the question of *writing creatively*, he went to the mother tongue. Michael Madhusudan and Bankim Chandra, in abjuring English for Bengali, have been the great exemplars for other writers. Of the three who wrote true poetry in English and not merely literary exercises, Derozio's mother-tongue was English, Toru Dutt lived in environments where not much Bengali was used, and Manmohan Ghose knew no Bengali. English was for them, therefore, the natural medium of expression. Derozio and Toru died prematurely. For Toru, the problem of identity was relieved through devotion to the Indian heritage ; Michael realized that English would stand in the way of his identity and gave it up. Bankim Chandra spent little time in the company of the alien medium. Manmohan Ghose, one of the best-gifted among Bengali poets, was worn down by a constant sense of cleavage between his own personality and the identity of his people.

Bengali Writing in English ought to be assessed, in a full scale study, within four contexts : (a) the context of contemporary English literature produced in England ; (b) the context of contemporary Bengali Writing in English ; (c) the context of Bengali literature influenced by English literature, and (d) the context of Bengali literature untouched by much or any external influence. And beyond these four contexts, there is, of course, the context of enduring worth, transcending time and social pattern. Considered within the framework of any of these contexts, Bengal writing in English has shown fluctuating directions. Kashi-prasad Ghosh and the Dutt's never succeeded in integrating their own values with the Western ; their English cloak gives them an unreal appearance, stilted and painfully self-conscious. Toru certainly was on the high road to integration when death intervened and cut was the branch that might have grown full straight. But judged within the framework of contemporary literature in Bengali, the versecraft of Derozio, Toru Dutt and Manmohan is superior to the versecraft of Bengali writers and the versecraft of even small poets such as Kashiprasad and Omesh Chunder and Shoshee Chunder reveals a certain competence that the emergent poetic diction of contemporary Bengali had not yet attained.

#### REFERENCES

1. W. H. Carey. *The Good Old Days of Hon'ble John Company*, i, 16-17.
2. Derozio's acting as Shylock in Drummond's Academy was praised by Dr. John Grant in the *India Gazette* of 20 December, 1822; for good acting in the same part in the same Academy, a boy called Kissen Chunder Dutt was praised in the *Calcutta Monthly Journal* in 1828.



3. Such contemporary journals as *Hickey's Gazette*, the *Calcutta Gazette* and the *Calcutta Monthly Journal* and such a compendium of historical records as Carey's *The Good Old Days* provide the curious investigator with numerous references to Shakespeare performances in Calcutta. See also *Calcutta Essays in Shakespeare*, ed. Amalendu Bose (Calcutta University, 1966), the following essays: Arabinda Poddar, 'Shakespeare in John Company's Calcutta'; Krishna Chandra Lahiri, 'Shakespeare in the Calcutta University'; Pallab Sen Gupta, 'Shakespeare in Calcutta theatres'.
4. Srinivasa Iyengar (*Indian Writing in English*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay & Co., 1962, p. 34) approvingly refers to E.F. Oaten's unintelligent linking up of Keats's name with Derozio's.

5. There is a curious, hitherto unnoticed, incident connected with Ghosh's poetry. I find in the *Forget-Me-Not* of 1835, p. 198, the best-known among the fashionable literary *genre* of the period, a footnote to a poem 'The Love-suit' by one Captain McNaghten: "I gather from a poetical volume by Kasiprasad Ghosh, a young and high-caste Hindoo of Calcutta (who, long before he had attained his twentieth year, had written English poetry of a superior order) that a species of bee called brahmar [sic] is fabled by his countrymen to be enamoured of the lotos [sic] flower."

This McNaghten must have been the Captain McNaghten, editor of *John Bull*, who thrashed Derozio in September 1831; see the *Indian Gazette*, September, 1831.

Quite obviously, this *John Bull*'s aim was to boost up the docile native imitator, Ghosh, as against the rebellious *Feringhee*, Derozio.

6. Students of Indian Writing in English owe their knowledge of Kylas Chunder's fiction—lying forgotten for over a century in the old files of the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*—to Pallab Sen Gupta's competent essay, 'Armed Struggle, aspiration for freedom and Young Bengal', a work of original and valuable research published in the Bengali Journal, *Chatuskhone*, Asvin 1372 of the Bengali Calendar.

Cherry Stones, /By. /Greece. C. Dutt. /"Trifles light as air," /Shakespeare. /A New Edition /Calcutta : /Printed by P. S. D'Rozario And Co., 12,

7. I have not seen the first ed. of Greece Chunder's volume; the title-page of the second edition runs thus :

Cherry Stones, /Ry. /Greece. C. Dutt. /"Trifles light as air," /Shakespeare. /A New Edition /Calcutta : /Printed by P. S. D'Rozario And Co., 12, Waterloo Street : /—/1881.

8. *Rajmohan's Wife*, ed. Brajendranath Banerji and Sajani Kanta Das, Centenary ed., Calcutta, 1941, Preface, the opening sentence.



## ART

The regime of the Grand Mughals witnessed outstanding achievements in every sphere of purposeful artistic pursuits. The arts of building and painting reached unwonted brilliance. The decorative scheme in architecture, meticulously planned and executed in a variety of ways, was illustrative also of a high degree of plastic sense and skill. In textiles there was a rich harvest and the excellence of the manifold types of plain and patterned fabrics may seem to be simply bewildering. In minor arts too there were produced charming modes and forms. Collectively, all these constitute a rich artistic heritage, inspired mainly by the intelligent and liberal patronage of the emperors a few of whom are known to have been endowed with keen aesthetic sense and discernment.

The disintegration of the empire meant also a general decline of all powerful artistic traditions in the country. A definite set-back was noticeable already during the reign of narrow and bigoted Aurangzeb. His death let loose the forces of disruption and the empire, which was rapidly losing ground, could not survive the shock of Nadir Shah's invasion and ultimately vanished. With the dissolution of the empire, hence, all forms of art languished and gradually petered out.

The impact of the west, that followed in the wake of the establishment of British paramountcy in India, stifled out whatever was left of the indigenous artistic activities. Yet, the contact with the British was not an unmixed evil altogether. The early days of the British rule engendered a general apathy towards the arts leading to the desiccation of the indigenous creative spirit. At the same time it brought in new forces which were destined to lead to an awareness of the artistic heritage of the country and the need for further aspirations in this regard. This situation was rather slow to appear. Bengal was the first to feel the new impact which was recognised in many spheres, including that of art. It is, however, at the turn of the present century that significant movements came into being paving the way for new artistic aspirations. Otherwise, the period under review, as already indicated, generally offers a dismal picture of steady retreat and decline, so far as artistic activities are concerned.

### A. ARCHITECTURE

The great legacy of the Mughals in architecture seems to be on the way of being irrevocably lost. This legacy had touched but little the building art in Bengal which followed its own tradition that was largely governed and determined by its own material brick and stucco. A few buildings raised at Dacca and, during our period, at Murshidabad were, to a certain extent, ineffectual attempts to reproduce the Mughal manner



without an understanding of its spirit or an awareness of the limitations of the material in this regard. In consequence they failed to be convincing productions. The many buildings of this order that adorned the city of Murshidabad in the days of its glory are now in a derelict condition. The most conspicuous is the Nawab's palace, called *Hāzār Duārī*, still in a good state of preservation. It is an imposing pile in three storeys, built in Italian fashion. Designed by General Duncan McLeod of the Bengal Corps of Engineers it was completed in 1837 and represents one of the earliest endeavours to transplant a foreign style on the Indian soil.

Among the buildings of the indigenous mode we still have the impressive remains of the *Katra Masjid*, built by Murshid Quli Khan in 1723. It stands on a high basement in the centre of an immense square court surrounded by cloisters on all the four sides. The cloisters are each disposed in a single row of double-storeyed chambers, each covered by a dome. At each corner of the court there stood a huge octagonal tower with a pronounced batter, which appears to be rather out of balance in relation to the low elevation of the cloisters. The mosque is rectangular in plan, much too long than it is broad (130 feet by 24 feet) and has octagonal minarets at the corners. The eastern façade has five arched entrances, each within a bigger engrailed arch accommodated within a rectangular fronton, rather weak and ineffective copy of the standard Mughal scheme. The roof is supported on transverse arches in the interior springing from the sides and is covered by five domes, again an indifferent reproduction of the Mughal manner. The *Katra Masjid* cannot be described to be a successful production; no other extant building in Murshidabad, however, can aspire to reach its level, either in conception or in execution. The Imambara, originally built by Siraj-u-Daulah, had been completely burnt down and was replaced in 1848 by a new one which is said to have been finished in the same manner as the old one. It is of the usual plan of a large rectangular building with a central court and having two additional courts on the east and west. The tomb of Alivardi takes the shape of three walled courts, each laid out as a formal garden, the innermost one containing the mausoleums of Alivardi and his grandson, Siraj-u-Daulah. Little remains of the palace in Hirājhil built by Siraj-u-Daulah with materials brought from Gaur. Similar is also the fate of the Sang-i-Dālān and other buildings in the grounds of the Motijhil. Mughal architectural style did never constitute a vital force in so distant a province. With an imperfect understanding and handicapped by the limitations of material the Bengal Nawabs had erected buildings in a style that was already decadent and approaching dissolution.

In spite of all court patronage, the transplantation of the Mughal style on the soil of Bengal was doomed to failure, first because the source was already desiccated and secondly on account of the fact that it was not suited to the land and its environment. Due to similar reasons the attempt to foist such alien traditions, as colonial western from various sources, failed also to develop any purposeful and effective architectural



style in Bengal during the period under study, though for a time such buildings came to be the fashion among the aristocratic classes. Many churches, based on the models of the Christian world, were built; but they remained exclusively alien. Times were not opportune enough for an intelligent assimilation of new ideas in order to adapt them to the conditions of the land.

In brick temples of various shapes and designs, however, Bengal had reared up charmingly individual expressions in building art. During the period under notice temple-building activity was assiduously pursued and among the innumerable temples erected in different parts of the territory there may be recognised not a few that can be described as felicitous productions by all standards. There were different types, but they all emerged from a common tradition which was a product of the soil having much deeper roots in the building practices in wood, bamboo, etc. In brick, and occasionally in stone, the forms established in impermanent materials were given a more or less durable character; and the characteristic features of some of these forms were pleasing enough to be accepted by even the Mughal and Rajput master builders who used them frequently with charming effect.

In view of the large number of erections of this kind it would seem advisable, within the limited scope at our disposal, to refer to them by types along with a description of the salient features of each. Broadly speaking, Bengali temples of the period may be divided into six types: (a) *Chālā*; (b) *Bāṅglā*; (c) *Ratna*; (d) Octagon-shaped; (e) *Deul* and (f) *Maṭha*. The last was characteristic of East Bengal.

(a) **CHĀLĀ TYPE**: Of frequent occurrence, the type consists of a square shrine with a hut-shaped superstructure of thatched shape above. Usually, two varieties may be recognised—(i) *chauchālā* and (ii) *āṭchālā*. In the former the superstructure resembles the shape assumed by four thatched roofs (*chālās*) form four sides converging at the apex; in the latter the superstructure is in two stages, each of an identical shape, the upper one being smaller in scale. Evidently, the form was derived from the thatched huts of bamboo and straw, so common in this part of the country. Closely akin to the thatched huts of Bengal, the type, it is presumable, originated in this territory. The Draupadī ratha, one of the rock-cut monoliths at Mahavalipuram (Madras), of the seventh century, reproduces the shape, except for the strait edged cornice, and indicates, in a manner, the antiquity of the type. The temple at Garui (Burdwan district) is another example in stone of this type. The type is the commonest among the brick temples of our period.

(b) **BĀŅGLĀ TYPE**: It consists of a rectangular shrine, again resembling that of two thatched roofs from front and back meeting at the apex. Varieties are achieved by joining longitudinally two such structures together, in which case it is known as *jor bāṅglā*, or by arranging four such structures on four sides of a central quadrangle; the latter is known as *chār bāṅglā*. Occasionally in *Jor Bāṅglā* temple, in



between the two roofs, is placed a *chauchālā* superstructure, possibly to add to the cohesion and strength of the two. *Chār bāṅglā* temple is of very rare occurrence, the only instance, so far known, being the one at Baranagar (Murshidabad district) erected by Rāṇī Bhavānī of Nator in the second half of the eighteenth century.

(c) *RATNA TYPE*: It consists of a square shrine with an ambulatory around or with a verandah in front. *Ratna*, which means jewel, stands in this context for tower (*śikhara*) and the chief interest of the type lies in its multi-towered superstructure. The simplest example of the type is the five-towered or *pañcha-ratna* temple which is a single-storeyed shrine with a central tower and with four turrets at the corner ones. Progressively, with the increase in the number of storeys in elevation, we have *nava-ratna* (nine-towered), *trayodaśa-ratna* (thirteen-towered), *sapta-daśa-ratna* (seventeen-towered), *ekaviṃśa-ratna* (twentyone-towered), temples, and so on. Sometimes, the turrets at the corners are in groups of two or three, thereby leading to an increase in the number of towers irrespective of the number of storeys. Temples of this type are usually larger and more ambitious productions.

(d) *OCTAGON-SHAPED*: This rare type consists of an octagonal shrine with a conical tower of the same design. A temple at Baranagar (Murshidabad district) and another at Nator (Rajshahi district) are the best known temples of this type. Both were erected by Rāṇī Bhavānī of Nator and it is presumable that the type was first introduced by her.

(e) *DEUL TYPE*: A square temple with a tall curvilinear tower had been a characteristic type of Bengali temples from pre-Muslim days. In the period under survey several temples of this type are also known to have been raised. The type survives, however, in a degenerate state with much of its elegance and proportions irretrievably weakened.

(f) *MAṬHA TYPE*: Besides the above, in East Bengal there may be noticed a fair number of square (sometimes octagonal) shrines with tall and slender conical spires resembling those of the Christian churches. Usually they were raised over the *chitās* (cremation grounds) of the dead and were called *maṭhas*. An interesting variety is recognised in a temple in which the tall spire is of the shape of a large number of jars placed one above the other in a receding scale and ending in a point. In the waterways of East Bengal the tall spires of the *maṭhas* serve as guiding landmarks to many a wayfarer.

The Bengal temples are usually supported on high basements that add to the elevation of the modest brick structures. The basements are of plain square shape and are larger in dimensions than the shrines, thus providing for circumambulation in the open. The plain square shape is relieved by the projection of the flight of steps in the middle of the front side or, though rarely, by four such projections in the middle of each of the four sides. The first four types are characterised by elegantly curved eaves together with curving ribs in the superstructures. These are derivations, no doubt, from the thatched hut prototypes in which they were



necessary concomitants in order to impart strength to the frameworks and to arrange for easy and quick drainage of water from the straw roofs. Usually, there is a verandah in front with an arcade of three engrailed arches. The ambulatory, where it exists, is enclosed by similar arcades, one on each of the four sides. The arches are supported on squat heavy columns of pleasing design divided axially into many sections, alternately square, octagonal and circular. The whole façade, not excluding the columns, is embellished with carved bricks of varied patterns—geometric, arabesque, floral and figural—each having a definite place in a well organised scheme. The figural works are employed to depict the various legends and myths and are composed in a number of carved bricks to complete the story. Secular and homely scenes are also not wanting in the decorative repertoire of the temple. Even in the most exuberant of the temples the ornamental scheme was always governed by and subservient to architecture, the form and lay-out of each pattern being determined by the lineaments of the structure. Besides the façade, the other three sides are also similarly treated occasionally. Generally, however, these are rather sparsely ornamented, one of the usual modes being the division of the wall surfaces into small panels fitted with carved brick patterns. Sometimes, particularly in the later phases the panels are kept empty. Gradually in the ornamental scheme there is less of figural work and the carved brick ornamentation is replaced by stucco work. The process indicates a weakening of the tradition that heralds its ultimate desiccation.

### B. SCULPTURE

The great tradition of sculpture in stone became practically extinct in Eastern India with the establishment of Islamic rule. The tradition of metal-casting lingered in some parts of Bengal, though in a decadent state, in the Islamic phase, but during the period under notice this too was to all purposes dead. In the days of the Company a fashion for ivory work prevailed and in Murshidabad there grew up a centre of ivory workers turning out pretty ornamental table pieces and images and statues in miniature. The early works reveal a fine delicacy in the handling of the material and in workmanship as well. They are characterised by sensitive and rounded modelling and constitute delightful pieces produced in ivory. Gradually, with the dwindling of demand, the workmanship tended to become coarser and treatment flatter. The works of this period are quite commonplace. The craft still lingers, but is practically in its last gasp.

In the riverine plains of Bengal clay has been the natural and popular medium of the artistic expression of the people from very ancient days. In clay the Bengali people have left a sure impress of their plastic sensibilities and capabilities and clay sculptures, either fashioned by the hand or impressed from moulds of pre-varicated models, have at all times been produced in thousands. The softness and pliability of the material render



subtle nuances in modelling possible and in this respect the works of the Bengali modellers have attained wide renown. Finished clay works, when fired for the sake of durability, assume a rich red texture which enhances the elegance of form and appearance a good deal. After firing a clay-work is technically known as terracotta.

It is the potters who largely carry on this art through generations and their hereditary skill has been chiefly responsible for its excellence. It remained a potent and vital tradition during our period, the principal reason being the wide demand for their services. First, there is the need for images of gods and goddesses for worship during religious ceremonies which were many and continued practically throughout the year. Secondly, there was the demand for portrayal of popular legends and myths for exhibition on festive occasions like *ratha-yātrā*, *rāsa-yātrā*, *jhulan-yātrā*, *charak* and the like. There were also demands for children's toys, pilgrims' mementos in the *tīrthas* and objects for household use and decoration. Images for worship and figures for portrayal of legends were often conceived in large dimensions and they were fashioned in clay over a core of bamboo and straw. They were then painted in appropriate colours. Images for worship were transitory works as they were required to be immersed after the respective ceremonies. No examples, hence, remain now to enable one to judge the quality of works produced during the period. Evidently, they were made strictly according to the prescriptions laid down in the scriptures and it is presumable that the traditional skill of the hereditary makers was maintained throughout. The portrayal figures, again of unbaked clay, also were usually of a temporary character, replacements being done as and when necessary; such replacements, it may be inferred, were not too infrequent. It is likely that in the depiction of the legends the artists had a greater freedom in the visualisation of the stories and their portrayals with the result that, not unoften, really forceful and efficient compositions were produced. Not infrequently again, social and contemporary skits were included in such shows, and in such an instance the artist tried to render it after a close and minute study of the subject, likenesses of the individual characters not excepted. Such show themes, legendary, social or depicting a contemporary event, were composed of individual figures modelled fully in the round and in three-dimensional views grouped together according to the laws of optical perspective. The presentations were highly realistic and it is not improbable that a few of the sketches of Indian themes by Westerners like Belnos, Fanny Parkes, etc. were inspired by them. Toys and pilgrims' mementos, usually in unbaked clay and produced from moulds, had summary modelling, the details being added in colours at the time of overpainting. Such objects in baked clay and with finer finish are also not unknown. The household objects had pleasing forms, while those meant for house decoration followed certain conventional motifs, meticulously thought-out and executed. The potters still maintain a commendable degree of skill in the production of such objects.



No examples of the above expressions of clay sculpture are extant, mainly because of the temporary character of the productions. It is in the terracotta ornamentation of the brick temples of the period that there exist visible remains of this art. There was a large demand for ornamental brickwork for relieving the bareness of temple facades and a particular class of workers seems to have specialised in this art. In inscriptions on a few of the temples the credit for such brick-work has been given to *sūtradharas* or carpenters. The angularities in figural works and other decorative patterns, characteristic of carpenters' handiworks, may corroborate such an assertion. Wooden mould is a necessary concomitant in the technique of brick-making and though the original model is supplied by the potter it devolves upon the carpenter to turn out a mould for purposes of duplication as necessary. It is possible, hence, that ornamental bricks began to be produced from wooden moulds fashioned by carpenters and the characteristics of wood-work persisted in the early works irrespective of the fact that the finished products were in malleable clay. Gradually, with growing experience and increasing awareness and understanding of the qualities and possibilities of the material intended, the carpenters developed a particular skill in turning out successful moulds suitable and efficient for the medium. It should be noted in this context that quite a good percentage of temple decoration is distinguished by a rounded plasticity in figural representations and fluid and sinuous wavy, scroll-works of foliage and arabesque patterns. Generally, such works belong to a phase that illustrates the maturity of the technique and tradition before they petered out. A few temples in Birbhum district of the closing decades of the nineteenth and the early years of the present century prove the survival of the tradition till the close of our period.

The ornamentation of a temple façade was designed on a grand scale with a variety of figural subjects and decorative patterns. In an ambitious production all the sides, from the base to the cornice, pulsate, so to say, with variegated forms, human, animal, vegetal and geometric. Usually, however, it is the front façade which is treated in this manner. The figural subjects include delineation of various myths and legends and of contemporary life as well. The vegetal and geometric devices run in bands the primary function of which was to emphasise the structural lineaments and to demarcate the areas of the narrative themes, that are spread over a number of bricks. Of the narrative themes of legendary character, the one chosen for the space above the central archway was often conceived on an epic scale and rendered with much force and action. The plinth and certain sections of the columns were usually reserved for scenes of contemporary life and also for *Kṛishṇayāna* and *Rāmāyāna* themes. The last two are also found scattered over in other sections of the facade, and their inclusion in the ornamental repertoire, irrespective of the religious affiliation of the monument, might possibly have been due more to their human appeal than to sacerdotal. Among the many successful motifs in this series mention should be made of the *rāsa-līlā*



episode composed in a rounded medallion in concentric bands delimited by floral scroll-work. The motif came to be very popular and had been used very often in temple decoration. The vegetal theme consists usually of the meandering creeper and floral patterns, while separate and individual lotus and floral rosettes appear throughout. Among the geometric motifs, that of chequers is the most effective, and disposed in bands it introduces pleasing play of light and shade up and along the surface. Bracket figures of elegant shapes are made to support the curved caves. A feeling for form characterises the best works. Everything is ordered and organised in a coherent scheme, though in the later works the patterns tend to become weak and mechanical presaging the inevitable decline of a vital tradition.

A passing reference may here be made also to the tradition of wood sculpture employed in the making of chariots, palanquins, boats, houses, etc. The chariots were made on the model of a *ratna* temple and the different tiers were beautified by figural works in the round and patterns in relief. Not infrequently, they exhibit charming forms. In palanquins the ends of the carrying pole are usually designed in the shape of a *makara*. In boat designs one usually hears of *mayūrapaṅkhīs*, in which the prow is designed in the shape of the forepart of a peacock with wings spread along the sides. Wood-works in the making of houses are confined to door-frames, beams, brackets, etc., the brackets particularly assuming ingenious shapes—human, animal and mythical.

### C. PAINTING

In the pre-Islamic phase Eastern India had developed an important school of miniature painting records of which are available in manuscript illustrations of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. The school had achieved significant qualities in linear and plastic treatment and in colour tones as well. The influences of the school were felt in Nepal and Tibet in the north and in Burma in the east. It collapsed, however, with the Islamic occupation of the land.

For a long time past Bengal had been the home of naive and simple folk tradition in painting. Early evidences of this tradition are extremely scarce, no doubt because of the fragile nature of the material on which they were done. Records of this mode are available in manuscript paintings from the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. Broad and curving linear rhythm with a surprising capacity of rendering the volumes and masses and defining the outline, which characterised the tradition, connects it with the classical Indian style, as evidenced in the cave paintings at Ajanta and Bagh and in manuscript illustrations, referred to above. The folk tradition differs from the classical in the simplicity and broadness of its composition and colour scheme and in its elimination of all unnecessary details. Another characteristic of the Bengali folk mode is the emphasis on form achieved by a certain dissonance in the coloured areas. This



folk mode lingered for centuries in spite of the social and political vicissitudes which, of course, affected but little the common folk. Scroll painting of the rural *paṭuās*, at one time largely in vogue throughout Bengal, reveals the vitality of this trend till about 1900. Despite local dialects, all folk expressions are linked together by such common characteristics as are referred to above.

Perhaps the best known records of the Bengali folk trend in painting are supplied by what are known as *paṭas* of Kalighat. This *paṭa* style emerged towards the latter half of the eighteenth century and remained potent for about a century. Kalighat has a special sanctity for the Hindus as one of the fifty-one sacred *pīṭhas* associated with the worship of the goddess Śakti. With the growth of Calcutta as the premier city in India, the sacred *tīrtha* standing in its neighbourhood rose also in importance and pilgrims came to visit the shrine in increasing numbers. As in all *tīrthas*, the incessant flow of pilgrims created a brisk market and a number of rural *paṭuās* from parts of western and southern Bengal migrated with their families to Kalighat and settled in the vicinity of the temple there. The vocations of these *paṭuās* consisted not only of picture-making, as their caste name signifies. They also made images and toys in clay, wood and variety of other lesser materials. Indeed, an impress of their important profession of making images and dolls may be found to be evidence equally in their *paṭas*, characterised, as they were, by bold and sweeping brush strokes, defining the full and rounded plastic masses that make up the form. By a manipulation of curves in the composition the features are chiselled, so to say, with an excellent precision. The chief merit of this art lies in the modelling capacity of the line, amazingly fresh and spontaneous. "The drawing", to quote Ajit Ghose who was the first to recognise the excellence of this tradition, "is made with one bold sweep of the brush in which not the faintest suspicion of even a momentary indecision, not the slightest tremor, can be detected. Often the line takes in the whole figure in such a way that it defies you to say where the artist's brush first touched the paper or where it finished its work."

These are qualities that may be found to have been inherent in the entire structure of Indian artistic tradition, and in view of this long-continuing heritage it is difficult to accept the theory advocated by Archer that the school presupposes 'Anglo-Indian source'. The illustrations that Archer cites in support of the possible Anglo-Indian content in theme as well as in mode do not appear to have emanated from the Kalighat tradition. Nor is the early date attributed to them above reasonable doubts. Archer further postulates that the later paintings show a weakening of the Anglo-Indian influences, whereas the truth seems to be the contrary. The Kalighat school seems to have started as a pure and spontaneous expression of the indigenous folk trend and the painting in which the qualities, detailed above, are valid were seemingly the earliest. In the later phases Anglo-Indian influences naturally and inevitably made



their intrusions leading to a weakening of the indigenous folk elements in the school. The decay began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The composition tended to become cruder and coarser, the superb draughtsmanship grew weaker, lines became broken and faltering, and, despite the introduction of the Anglo-Indian modes of shading and stippling, the figures in the later *paṭas* lacked that chiselled precision which characterised the earlier works. Economic reasons and changes of tastes were, no doubt, the main factors that contributed to this decline. At the same time it should also be remembered that the impact of the alien modes sapped the very foundation of this naive and simple folk trend, which became extinct early in the present century.

Kalighat paintings depict mythological themes as well as humorous skits on social and topical subjects, the latter gradually growing popular in the later phases. The themes, usually limited, were endlessly repeated, each from a type picture preserved in the family. The quality of the earlier paintings deteriorated in the later generations lacking the spontaneous dexterity and manipulative skill of their forbears.

The great tradition of Mughal painting did little affect the indigenous trends in Bengal. Doubtless it is that a provincial offshoot (*qalam*) of the Mughal school flourished at Murshidabad during the short span of life of the newly risen Bengal kingdom which lasted appropriately for a period of fifty years. Nearer to the best achievements of the Mughal school the products of the Murshidabad *qalam* are found to have a certain refreshing vitality, quite different from the somewhat weak and sentimental works associated with the contemporary imperial court. The *qalam* emerged about 1720 with works produced in Mughal fashion, formal and rigid to a certain extent. Alivardi in his later years seems to have evinced some interest in painting and the interest of this forceful personality was responsible for a few works produced between 1750 and 1755, which, though in contemporary Mughal manner, have a certain freshness in respect of composition, in precise draughtsmanship, restrained colour scheme, delineation of actions and moods and an individualistic treatment of the landscape. But soon the spell was over. The works produced during the brief reign of Siraj-u-Daulah retain the above qualities, but after him the products were commonplace and sank into insignificance. This decadent Murshidabad trend, it should be noted, lay at the root of what emerged as the Patna *qalam* under the tutelage of western mode and technique. Conditioned as it was, the Murshidabad *qalam* was not destined to exercise any significant effect on the contem-modes prevailing in Bengal.

The alien Britishers in the early days of their rule were not likely either to check the decay of indigenous artistic traditions or to initiate a new and fruitful movement for a resurgence of artistic instinct and activities. These early Britishers, the makers of the British empire in India, were men of little learning and culture whose only object was to expand the Company's trade and political hegemony in India and to acquire vast fortunes for themselves in the offing. They had no interest either for their



own culture or for the Indian. It is true that reports of the fabulous wealth of the Company's officers attracted a large number of British artists to India. But the conditions prevailing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not suitable for any real and happy commingling of ideas and modes of the two alien traditions to prepare the ground for a new movement. Tilly Kettle arrived in India in 1769 and the news of his success induced many others of his profession to follow him. Till 1820 the flow of British artists to India was, more or less, continuous and regular and they worked for the Company's new nabobs and for Indian princes and nobles. After 1820 the regular flow stopped as a result evidently of a fall in the demand for the works of the British artists.

The paintings executed by the British artists in India fall into three categories. In the earliest days the fashion seems to have been for large-size oil paintings, a mode that was entirely alien to India. The three best exponents of this mode were Tilly Kettle, Johan Zoffany and Arthus Devis, each of them amassing a vast wealth by the profession of his art. John Smart, Ozias Humphrey and George Chinnery were the leaders of the art of miniature painting, particularly portraits in ivory. This mode ousted the large-sized oils from favour. The third category of British painting in India consisted of water-colour drawings, either as ends in themselves or as studies of subsequent engravings, aquatints or lithographs. William Hodges, Thomas and William Daniells, and others executed in this mode a large number of views and landscapes which were highly popular in Europe.

Among the British artists who sojourned in India a few belonged to the top rank. The paintings executed by them in various mediums were also certainly not small in number. As an instance it may be stated that the Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta has alone in its collection as many as 140 original works by Thomas and William Daniells. It is surprising that the works of the British artists did not evince any Indian feeling, or produce any impact on indigenous Indian painting. The West and the East had definitely contrasting traditions of art and it is difficult to combine the two unless a mutual understanding is possible. The style and modes which the British artists brought to India were firmly established in the western mould from which any deviation was considered to be a sacrilege. Their sense of superiority precluded, again, any receptive attitude or mood on their part so as to enable them to know and understand the Indian modes and techniques. Later, from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Indian artists received some training in Western techniques and styles for works under the Company's commissions. At that time indigenous traditions had reached practically the lowest ebb, and the artists in their moribund state had already lost the instinct and capability required for a better understanding and assimilation of an alien trend. Little could they imbibe of the new techniques and modes, much less their feeling and spirit. The result was the emergence of some bastard styles (commonly called Anglo-Indian or Indo-British) in different



parts of the country, their divergences mainly depending on the differing indigenous modes. On the whole, none of these styles can be said to have much artistic merit. Their main purpose was illustration and this function they fulfil to a certain extent. In Eastern India, the Patna school of painting furnished one instance of this bastard art.

With the growth of western education in the latter half of the nineteenth century, schools of art were established in different centres for art-instruction of Indians. Presided over by European artists, the courses of instruction in such schools aimed at copying faithfully Western works of art in occidental techniques and modes. In such a method there was very little scope for originality or individuality. In fact, such qualities were often baulked at. In spite of the fine delineative skill, the paintings of the students and artists trained in this method lacked character and appeared to be shams and ineffective. No great art can be fostered by ignoring the traditions of the soil and its environments.

In this dismal state of general decay and desiccation, as outlined above, Kalighat paintings of the early phase provide a refreshing interlude signifying the potentiality of Bengal as the centre of an artistic urge and impulse under changed conditions. It is not surprising that about the beginning of the present century there was felt an awakening which led to the emergence of a new and significant artistic movement in Bengal. The contributions of the new movement fall outside the scope of the present study. Yet, the background and direction of this movement may be briefly indicated in order to facilitate an understanding of the foundation of modern art movements in India.

The new movement is said to have started with a retrograde step. Several circumstances may have conditioned this. In 1896 E. B. Havell, an Englishman, joined as Principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta. He came to India in 1884 to take charge of the Government School of Art in Madras. He felt dissatisfied with the method of instruction in art schools in India. Meanwhile he had delved deep into Indian lore and culture. When he came to Calcutta as the head of the premier art institution in the country he thought that the opportunity had come and he denounced in unequivocal terms the method of art instruction in the country. At the same time, with his great regard for India's past heritage in the field of art he dwelt on the necessity of an intimate acquaintance with the past traditions of the country and of recapturing their glories. About the beginning of the present century Lord Curzon took steps to make us conscious of our great heritage in art and architecture. The movement for national awareness, that was beginning to take shape in the last decade of the nineteenth century, had its tempo quickened in Bengal in the beginning of the twentieth as a result of the Swadeshi movement consequent to the unwanted partition of Bengal, again an award of Lord Curzon. Never were the times more propitious for an appeal to the country's past.

The leader of the new movement was Abanindranath Tagore, a talented





colleague of Havell in the Government School of Art in Calcutta. He belonged to a gifted family deeply steeped in Indian lore and culture. In spite of his thorough training in the western modes, Abanindranath felt the formal and realistic concept of Western art to be handicap to the intellectual and imaginative function of art. Following Havell, he also delved deep into Indian artistic and literary lores in order to seek new ground and new inspiration. His quest was not confined to India alone, but was extended far beyond, to Iran on the one hand and Japan on the other. This versatility led him to discover his style which may be described as a fusion of the occidental and oriental modes without any detriment to the character of Indian art tradition. This style was entirely a creation of his for the expression of his own genius and in fulfilment of his own artistic impulse. His aesthetic ideals and his charming personality drew around him a small band of young artists. The Master with his immediate pupils were the pioneers of the new movement.

Because of this studied attempt to return to the past the movement has been described to have begun with a retrograde step. Such a step, it may be felt, was a necessary one. In the general state of chaos and disintegration, as outlined above, such a return appeared to have been called for in order to find a solid ground and mooring in the past artistic heritage of the country, if not for anything else. The achievements of every great period of Indian art were explored and their possibilities carefully analysed. With this knowledge of the past there were experiments in diverse methods, manners and techniques. It is by such laborious processes, and guided by the genius of a master artist, each of his pupils discovered his own distinctive metier. The work of the pioneers initiating the new movement cannot be described as slavish imitation of any one of the past styles. Each had acquired his own individuality in interpreting his imaginative conception in colour and form by following an indigenous style and traditional methods. The new movement started with a creative urge and impulse and produced many distinguished artists, and they, in their turn, led the movement to further advances. It explored the past legacies; that does not mean that the movement itself was retrograde.

In recent years it has been usual to disparage the new movement as barren. Critics fail to recognise that it had behind it a conscious awakening and creative inspiration and that it showed great promise and potentialities from the start. It had produced significant and distinctive works and a number of talented artists who had guided the destinies of many an art institution in the country for approximately a quarter of a century. It signified the first awakening after a stupor of about two centuries. It heralded a new resurgence of artistic impulse throughout the country. The neo-Bengal school (as the new movement came to be known) may not have been a modern movement in the strictest sense of the term. But one cannot and should not forget that it underlies the artistic resurgence that ushered in the modern art movement in India.



## MUSIC

It is difficult to trace a systematic development of music in Bengal during the middle ages for want of details. The far eastern province of Bengal wanted to retain its free identity as far as possible in every sphere of life and the big cultural movements in the western sector did not easily find their course in Bengal. The result was that Bengal retained its pristine structure of music when new developments were forging ahead in western India specially in the regions of Agra and Gwalior. During the early Mughal period the old complicated form of music had undergone a revolutionary change by the creation of Dhrubapada and while this novelty achieved great success in the imperial Durbar Bengal was satisfied with the old Prabandh music. Even the Padavali Kirtan established by Thakur Narottam in the Vaishnava festival at Khetari (Rajshahi District) was only a modification of this old form. During the Sultanate period the rulers of Bengal like the lords of the west enjoyed Turkish or middle eastern music in their courts and foreign singers or instrumentalists visited this land at special invitations. There is no proof that they had any contact with the native musicians and the musical culture at the court remained entirely distinct from the indigenous music. Yet it is presumed that certain forms of western developments had very slowly crept into the music of Bengal and there are evidences that songs like Chutkala (Chitrakala) and Dhrubapada were well known in Bengal at the end of the seventeenth century. It is said that Chutkala was formulated by Sultan Hussain Sharqi of Jaunpur who had been sheltered by Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah of Bengal after his defeat at the hands of Sultan Bahlul Lodi. An example of Dhrubapada has been quoted by Ghanashyamdas in his *Bhaktiratnakar* from Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. All these forms were in the fold of Ksudragiti (small lyric songs) and were simplified modifications of the western Dhrubapada. It has been stated in *Ragadarpan* (1666) written by Saif Khan Faqirullah that two eminent singers visited Bengal with Sultan Shuja and one of them, Misr Manjan Dhari was a pupil of Bilas Khan, son of Tansen. There were very few who could compete with him in Bengal. This information gives us an indication how the Seni style of Dhrubapad found its way in Bengal. It is, however, difficult to conjecture how far the songs of Tansen had spread in the Bengali circle as there is no evidence to show that they had left any native disciples. Ramprasanna Bandyopadhyaya says in his *Sangita Manjari* that one Bahadur Sen (Shah Bahadur or Bahadur Khan) was invited to Bishnupur by Raghunath II in the early 18th century with a view to acquaint the local singers with the Durbari music. It is believed that this Bahadur was the founder of Seni school of music at Bishnupur. This also cannot be accepted without doubt because the identity of the so-called Bahadur Sen is shrouded in mystery. Anyhow, Tansen's songs were known to





Bishnupur during the latter part of the 18th century and gradually a new style developed in that region forming a distinct pattern of its own.

Apart from the vocal songs it is observed from various references in the *Mangala Kavyas* during the declining Mughal rule that all the well known string and percussion instruments of western India were in use in Bengal. It is presumed that instruments like Rabab and Pakhawaz were played in the current style of Raga music which was not different from the other parts of the western India. If so, vocal music should also have been equally forward. Whatever might be the position of music in India at the end of the 17th century, there can be no doubt that there was a rapid stir in the musical circle of Bengal at the beginning of the 18th century.

The Nawabi rule in Bengal from Murshid Quali to Alivardi brought internal peace and during this time the popular music of Bengal made a headway as against the old and static classical form. The most outstanding creation of this age was the *Kavi* songs. It was a very lively variety since it was wordy duel set in tunes. Generally an episode on the life of Shri Krishna and Gopis was the theme and one party raised an issue while the other gave a fitting reply when the former ended. Its movements were distinctly different from the existing classical types. Movements like Chitan, Parchitan, Fuka, Melta, Mahara, Shawari etc. used in Kavi (or Danda Kavi) were not conventional movements which were Sthayi, Antara, Sanchari and Abhog used in classical songs. The Kavi songs were akin to Qawali songs in many respects and equal importance on percussion instruments was laid in both these varieties. It appears that the idea of Kavi songs occurred from Qawali songs held among the aristocrats of the ruling circles and an indigenous form was established by degrees. Kavi songs possessed a type of love song called Kheur and along with it a song of Tappa style was set in the end. Another form known as *Tarja* was definitely modelled on the lines of Urdu or Persian song of that type much in use at the end of the Mughal rule. Panchali was an old form current upto the end of the nineteenth century. Ghanashyamdas in his *Sangita Sarasangraha* (early eighteenth century) has mentioned this as a form of Ksudragiti. According to the authority quoted by him it was a very long tuned narrative sometimes rendered solo or sometimes in chorus. He has not quoted any example but has said that Panchali was well known in the country of Gauda. This well known variety was not, however, prevalent at the time of Bharatchandra (1760) who had set up a new model and thereafter Dasharathi Roy introduced it in an entirely new fashion. The only common thing was that in all cases it remained a long narrative. However, the chanting of Panchali is not what counts but the short Tappa and other varieties of lyric songs within it were its singularities.

Such was the condition of music in the middle of the eighteenth century when the country was passing into the hands of the British from the Muslims. The technique of Dhrupad was known to the higher class



as will be evident from the description of the court of Maharaja Krishna Chandra Roy as given by Bharatchandra in his *Annanda Mangal*. Bharatchandra mentions the name of one Kalawant Bishram Khan who was present at this court. In those days only the singers of Dhrupad were known as Kalawants or Kalwants. Not only Dhrupad but Kheyal, Tappa and other western Indian forms were also known to some degree as is proved by the compositions of Kaviranjan Ramprasad (1720-8) many of whose songs were sung on measures (Tal) like Jalad Tetala, Ara and Ektal. His own style known as Ramprasadi did not follow the tradition of Dhrupad but Dadra or Ar-Khemta, also Lofa in some cases. Agamani songs which were introduced by him also followed the tradition of Tappa.

The most talented composer of lyric songs in Bengal was Ramnidhi Gupta, better known as Nidhu Babu. He was born in 1741 and died at the age of ninety-seven in the year 1839. We do not know how far he was trained in the Raga music current in Bengal but we are aware that his outlook of music changed at Chhapra where he picked up Tappa songs of western India. The short and suggestive Tappa songs, their plaintive character reoriented his imagination and kindled the creative force in him. It is said that his tutors were reluctant to impart the lessons he wanted apprehending that his genius would render him a greater master than any of them. He was disgusted with this niggardly treatment and promised to open a parallel course in his own language where he intended to put forth the best he achieved from them. The success was unique. He was practically the founder of the modern Bengali songs and his influence on Rabindranath Tagore who came much later and at an entirely different period was not insignificant. Ramnidhi was an educated man and had a very cultured mind. His poems, mostly of a few lines, were elegant, deep, emotional and perfectly finished. His style of Tappa was different from the western style. He introduced a technique which was most suited to the sentiment of Bengal and the art of poetry found its expression much more in it than the display of musical technicalities. His followers, however, could not retain this character. Gradually the gravity of this art was lost and the Tappa of Bengal degenerated into erotic songs and were most lightly treated by frivolous singers and dancing girls so common in the later Babu culture until the middle of the nineteenth century. There were hundreds of Tappa composers since Ramnidhi Gupta but a handful of them deserved real recognition. Kali Mirza was a contemporary of Ramnidhi and was a singer of great reputation. His Tappas were of high order. Sridhar Kathak who was also a later contemporary of Ramnidhi composed a number of masterly Tappa songs rich in musical as well as literary qualities.

Ramnidhi Gupta developed a form known as Akhrai, set into fashion by Kului Chandra Sen, who was his uncle. This style owes its origin to the Akhara class prevalent in the Mughal aristocratic houses (*Ain-i-Akbari*, Dhap. on music). It was a society in which women also took part in singing. It consisted of dance, songs and instrumental music.



This practice was largely in vogue among the nobles not only in the Mughal court but also in the ruling circles throughout the country. Naturally, the custom became common in Bengal also. It occurred to some enthusiasts that this art song would be a welcome novelty if brought into public view from the limited private circles. Efforts were made to remodel it according to popular taste and gradually it gained popularity. Kului Chandra Sen probably made some special innovations and earned reputation as its founder. According to some Akhrai songs were first introduced in Santipur which is also believed to be the original seat of Kheur songs. But the idea must have come from the old Akhara which was existing since a long time in the high society of Bengal. Akhrai songs in the revised form could not have made remarkable progress unless Ramnidhi Gupta had laid his hand on its organisation with his immense fame and influence. It consisted of songs and musical interludes. The songs were mostly of Tappa class often preceded by some lines sung in a slow tempo similar to Dhrupad. These were known as Bhawani Bishayak (or pertaining to Bhawani) and ended with love songs. The technique of Raga music was strictly followed in the songs and the instrumental music was specially exhilarating due to its graceful movement from slow to a very quick tempo. It is known from the description given by Iswar Gupta in *Sambad Prabhakar* (15th July, 1854) that violin occupied a prominent place with indigenous instruments like Tambura, Vina, Jaltarang, Flute, Sitar, Metal Discs, Drums etc. Ramnidhi Gupta had organised Akhrai songs about 1804 and violin must have been well known in Bengal by the end of the eighteenth century. The idea of orchestration first occurred in these Akhrai soirees where it was known as Saz (Persian word meaning a musical instrument as well as concord, harmony). Use of such words also suggests that this Akhrai was a modification of the older Akhara prevalent in Mughal times. This variety was further modified by Mohan Chand Basu who started Half Akhrai in January, 1832 (*Kavijivani*—Bhabatosh Datta, p. 409) in Baghbazar, Calcutta. Mohan Chand who was a favourite disciple of Ramnidhi Gupta relaxed the rigid classical style of Raga songs and added some new colour to it making it much more attractive than both the Kavi and Akhrai varieties.

Along with the above, experiments were carried out in other spheres also. Special mention may be made of the *Panchali* which has been referred to earlier. The old form of Panchali was already obsolete and the subsequent modernised form at the time of Bharatchandra was also almost forgotten. An attempt was now made to revive this in a remodelled form. In this form narratives were full of alliterations which profusely pleased the listeners. Wit and humour were added to it. The narrator had a glib tongue, ready wit and a sweet voice to render songs, if necessary. Otherwise songs were performed by efficient singers in the party. Besides Panchali there was a form of popular music sketch known as *Krishna Yatra* which was openly performed in the meadows and courtyards. The songs in such Yatras were simple lyrics where all types of



mixed modes were witnessed. The old Padavali Kirtan was popularised by the creation of Dhap Kirtan which was easier and more attractive. Madhusudan Kinnar of Jessore composed many famous songs in this style. It was later on further developed by Govinda Adhikari and Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya. Dasharathi Roy (1806-57) introduced a number of songs in his Panchalis which were new from various aspects although the traditional style was not ignored. He, however, retained Tappa largely in his songs. He introduced several modes and measures giving a dramatic touch to his compositions. Novelties were witnessed in Yatras which showed a tendency to be more socialised. *Vidya-Sundar* was an excellent outcome of this attempt. This Yatra was created in the third decade of the nineteenth century and was immensely popular, specially the party organised by Gopal Uria won an unparalleled reputation. Its songs were short and suggestive. A new type emerged from this Yatra which was known as *Ar-Khemta* having a pleasing appeal to the audience. Its influence was long standing because of its charm and softness. This lively song sketch gave a new impetus to the future creation of lyric songs.

Wajed Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Lucknow, was interned in Calcutta at Metiaburz during the latter part of the nineteenth century (1856-1887). He was a great patron of music. His house was a seat of musical gatherings. Brilliant singers used to visit him from outside and local talents also tried to win his recognition. The result was that the Bengali singers grew most interested in the western style of the Hindustani music and adopted Hindi Dhrupad, Kheyal, Thungri etc. ignoring their own precious songs. The habit of composing Bengali songs and rendering them in the indigenous way was rapidly given up and there was a set back in the creative force in the music of Bengal. The situation would not have been so if the musicians of Bengal had tried to give a new colour to the songs of their own language by absorbing the new merits which they found in the Hindustani music. Instead they eschewed their own songs and took more pride in getting recognition as Ustads in Hindustani music. Many of them hastened to the representatives of the celebrated Gharwanas and identified with them. Perhaps Bishnupur was the only centre of Dhrupad in Bengal which jealously guarded its own tradition. It has already been mentioned that cultivation of music began to thrive at Bishnupur from the eighteenth century under the patronage of Raghunath II. Thereafter various singers enriched this school and by the middle of the eighteenth century it was at the height of its glory with the rise of Ramshankar Bhattacharya who firmly established the fame of Bishnupur as a seat of Dhrupad culture. He left a number of disciples who had also become famous afterwards. Ramkeshab Bhattacharya was a renowned exponent of Bishnupuri style of Dhrupad during the middle of the nineteenth century and obtained patronage of Ashutosh Deb (Satu Babu) who himself was a musician of no ordinary merit. Along with him the name of Keshablal Chakravarty deserves mention as he had also great





reputation in Calcutta about the same time. Ksetramohan Goswami, one of the outstanding personalities in music had his preliminary training from Ramshankar at Bishnupur. The other two of his illustrious contemporaries were Dinabandhu Goswami and Anantalal Bandopadhyay. The latter was the chief exponent of Bishnupur style and had a large number of students of whom his own sons Ramprasanna and Gopeswar carried forward his efforts until recent times. Among the later singers Jadunath Bhattacharya and Radhika Prasad Goswami earned wide reputation. The former is well known as a composer. Both of them had their initial training at Bishnupur.

The musical situation of Bengal was not very encouraging at this time. The old stalwarts had gone leaving several imitators who corrupted music to such an extent that it catered pleasure only to the Babus and the rich. Light and amorous songs with very little musical value were the fashion of the day. Kavis and Panchalis were degenerate to the extreme and their vulgarities were immensely enjoyed leaving aside all other good qualities of the pristine music. This unfortunate situation was considerably saved by a puritanic reaction which gathered momentum by the rise of the Brahmo sect in Bengal. Rammohun Roy himself composed devotional songs for his prayer and it is said that he had his music lessons from Kali Mirza, a famous contemporary of Ramnidhi Gupta. Rise of Brahmo culture in Bengal was a boon to the existing society since it had kindled a spirit of self criticism and helped the preservation of what was really good and worthwhile. A serious endeavour was made by the educated elite to retain the deserving tunes and types. Although the ideal of Brahmasangeet was chiefly religious the efforts of Brahmo Samaj to improve the lyric songs of Bengal were nevertheless enormous. Because of this highly cultured approach the educated society in general used to attend the prayers of the Samaj and were greatly impressed by the high place given to music by them. The formalities of classical music as well as the beauty of lyric songs were fully retained. This balancing effect was possibly the best example that was emulated by others in rendering the current songs in a polished way. The foundation of the Brahmasangeet was laid by Raja Rammohun Roy and his associates. Then came Maharsi Debendranath Tagore with a host of friends, followers and his own descendants who established Brahmasangeet as an art song and created varieties. Among other stalwarts mention may be made of Acharya Keshab Chandra Sen, Bijoy Krishna Goswami, Kunjabehari Deb, Trailakyanath Sanyal, Pratap Chandra Majumdar and others. Afterwards men like Pandit Shivnath Shastri, Nagendranath Chattopadhyay, Kalinarayan Gupta came forward to enrich Brahmasangeet which also compassed the compositions of popular singers like Dasharathi Roy, Nilkantha Mukhopadhyay, Kangal Harinath, Fakirchand and others. Compositions of eminent litterateurs like Kaliprasanna Ghosh, Krishnachandra Majumdar, Gobindachandra Roy, Rajanikanta Sen, Atulprasad Sen, Swarnakumari Devi, Kamini Roy were frequently sung and all these



formed the voluminous collection of Brahmasangeet which was invariably found in every educated household of Bengal.

Gradually a spirit of evaluating the merits of the music of Bengal created during the two centuries arose among the next composers who liberally adopted the better technique and enriched the music with their enlivened and conscious contribution. This impetus was given by Jyotirindranath Tagore who made various experiments with lyric songs accompanied by piano, organ and harmonium. He was followed by his younger brother Rabindranath Tagore and a host of famous contemporaries. Rabindranath Tagore accepted the best in the existing music and introduced them in his compositions with an open and liberal mind. While he was greatly influenced by the suggestive expressions in the earlier Tappa compositions he was no less influenced by the sober well-knit structure of Dhrupad and both the qualities are equally prominent in his own compositions. He had also a deep regard for folk tunes which he successfully mingled in many of his songs patriotic as well as purely lyrical. Certain trends of European music were also liked by him and he carried on experiments with them. These qualities are equally applicable to Dwijendralal Roy, another celebrity of this age. He brought a manly vigour to the music of Bengal which was deplorably wanting so long. His national songs still remain unsurpassed in charm and energy. He was an admirer of the manly qualities in European music and manifested them most successfully in his own creations. Later on came Rajanikanta Sen and Atulprasad Sen who have left their mark on patriotic and lyric songs already enriched by the above personalities who practically represented Bengal towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of this century. Besides the improvement made by the above intellectuals there was a development of music in the newly established theatres. New ideas of orchestration were introduced by Jyotirindranath Tagore and songs of multifarious types were contemplated by him, his brother Rabindranath, Dwijendralal, Girish Chandra Ghosh and others. Many composers also grew up who set tunes to the dramatic songs and were not themselves literary producers. Manomohan Bose was an assiduous thinker in this sphere and was himself a composer of lyrics. Even the novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote several songs including his famous *Bande Mataram* which were profusely sung. *Ali Baba*, a play written by Kshirode Prasad, brought a healthy turn in the dramatic music and has remained ever green upto this time. It was an age of lyric songs and its field was much broader than the age preceding because of varieties and novelties. Success was more abundant during this age because the composers were mainly intellectuals. They not only opened new avenues in music but also created literature. The age of Tappa, Kavi, Akhrai, Half Akhrai and Panchali does not bear any comparison with this age because the past talents were considerably immature and their show was directed to the unenlightened public rather than to the intellectuals.

Lastly, a survey of the theoretical studies is essential to have a correct



appreciation of the endeavours upto the dawn of the present century. Radhamohan Sen, a contemporary of Ramnidhi Gupta and an inhabitant of Calcutta, published a grammatical and historical work on music in poetry named *Sangeeta Taranga* in 1818. He was well versed in Sanskrit and Persian and drew his materials from both the sources. This book is a valuable guide to the research workers till to day. Krishnada Vyasdeva published his four volumes of huge anthology titled *Sangita-Ragakalpadruma* in 1846. The contribution of this devotee of music who did not belong to Bengal is immense and this was one of the earliest attempts to compile the musical composition of all composers throughout India. He also incorporated the Sanskrit musicological texts as far as could be collected by him. This endeavour was supplemented by Raja Shourindramohan Tagore in association with his tutor Ksetramohan Goswami. His works are more than ten in number out of which special mention may be made of "*Hindu Music from various authors*" and "*Universal History of Music*". He took great pains to compile all the essays written by European scholars on Indian music and published them in the form of a compendium. He also wrote a hand book of musical instruments specially used in Bengal. His "*Yantra Ksetra Dipika*" is also valuable in as much as it gives a good idea of the Ragas prevalent in Bengal during his time. He founded the Music Academy which was one of the earliest endeavours to spread the academic culture of music. Another noble venture was his compilation of Sanskrit treatises which he published under the title "*Sangita Sara Sangraha*". Practically the whole of *Sangit Ratnakar* of Sarnga Deva has been incorporated in the volume. Though much of the content is in corrupt form nevertheless it must have served the research workers very well at that period. Ksetramohan Goswami is famous for his "*Sangit Sar*" and "*Kantha Kaumudi*". He also published some notations of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda which are specimens of the traditions of this great musical production coming down through generations. Krishnadhan Bandopadhyaya was a thorough critic of Indian music and published his famous "*Gitasutrasar*" in 1885. He discussed the merits and demerits of the existing as well as ancient music with open mind and was very much objective in his approach. Although he has been highly praised for this work his assessment does not appear to be correct in all cases and he did not do justice to the authoritative Sanskrit works having prejudiced views and adverse conceptions. In many cases his observations have been rude and unwarranted because of his lack of adequate study in Sanskrit musicology. Nevertheless he was a practical observer and made certain wholesome suggestions for the improvement of contemporary music. He was in favour of introducing European Staff Notation in our music but was not successful in establishing it as his views were perhaps too forward for his age. Numerous types of notations were contemplated about the end of the last century but only the *Akarmatrick* system evolved by Jyotirindranath Tagore was ultimately adopted being easy to render and follow. This system was very ably demonstrated by Jyotirindranath Tagore himself in



his *Svaralipi Gitimala* published in 1897. He was also the founder of Bharat Sangit Samaj which greatly helped the spread of music in the cultured circle of Bengal. Besides he edited two well known music journals viz, *Vina Vadini* (1807) and *Sangit Prakashika* (1901). These two journals, specially the latter which lasted for ten years, are highly valuable for musical essays and notations of old and current songs. The idea of maintaining biographies and retaining musical compositions of the erst-while musicians also occurred in the last century. Ramnidhi Gupta himself published his *Gitaratna* just before his death. Iswar Gupta did the pioneering work of collecting the biographies and compositions of musicians including Kaviwallas and published them in his journal *Sambad Pravakar*. Later on it became a practice to publish musicological discourses in the literary journals such as *Tattva-Bodhini*, *Balak*, *Bharati*, *Sadhana* etc. in which, among others, Rabindranath Tagore was a most prominent writer. In this way musicology has become part and parcel of Bengali literature.

We thus find Bengal quite forward in music when the country was on the threshold of another national movement in 1905 when further possibilities of music opened before the modern thinkers, creators and intellectuals. This period, popularly known as Swadeshi movement, witnessed the growth of patriotic songs which opened a new chapter in the history of the music of Bengal.

The noblest inspiration of patriotic songs came from the Hindu Mela which was established in 1867 headed by Ganendranath Tagore and Nabagopal Mitra. The former himself showed the way by composing লজ্জায় ভারতবর্ষ গাহিব কী করে (How in shame should I sing the glory of India!) which was sung in the fair. One of the pledges taken by the organisers was composing and fostering of national songs. The most famous song in this fair in 1868 was গাও ভারতের জয় (Sing the glory of India) composed by Satyendranath Tagore. Originally this was sung in Raga Khambaj by Vishnu Chakravarty, the renowned Ustad of the house of Tagores and also widely known in the cultured society of Calcutta. Afterwards it was sung in a different tune in the Great National Theatre. Another popular song sung in this fair was মলিন মুখচন্দ্র ভারত তোমারি (India, your moon-like face is sad) composed in Rag Nat-Bihag by Dwijendranath Tagore. Among the other contributors mention may be made of the contemporary musical thinker Monomohan Basu, social leader Dwarkanath Gangopadhyay and composer Govindachandra Roy who wrote কতকাল পরে বল ভারতেরে দুখসাগর সাঁতারি পার হবে (Tell me India, how long you will take to swim across the sea of grief). On the other side, patriotism in music was gaining momentum with the composition of "Bande Mataram" by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and every political uprising inspired the poets to produce a number of songs imbued with national feelings.

The nature of these songs was, however, not provocative nor could these be called war songs. These reminded the people of their own



weakness which had to be overcome. These songs appealed to them to shun their defeatist mentality and rely on their inner strength which alone could remain unbending in all circumstances. The country was looked upon as the divine mother whose honour had to be protected at all costs. The composers chiefly looked into the indigenous modes and styles to portray their feelings so that the songs could easily reach the hearts of the people and move them. Rabindranath Tagore possibly achieved the greatest success in this respect. In his songs he introduced in a great measure the folk tunes of Bengal and thereby produced a moving appeal to the sentiments of millions. He was probably the first composer to turn our mind to the simple songs of the rural people and to show that the qualities in these unsophisticated songs were worthy of appreciation and adoption in the art songs as well. This example was also followed by Rajanikanta Sen and many of his songs became extremely popular during these days. D. L. Roy was a different personality. It has already been said that he did not hesitate to adopt the European technique to strengthen his songs. He had put forth a vigour in his songs hitherto unknown and the inspiration instilled in his chorus songs was unique. Among the others whose songs aroused profound national and emotional feelings and had a great influence special mention may be made of Kaliprasanna Kavyavisharad, Kamini Kumar Bhattacharya, Monomohan Chakravarty and Sarala Devi. There were some anonymous songs as well which inspired people of different localities.

Altogether it may be said that the patriotic songs of this age encompassed all conceivable sources of music having original characteristics which could be claimed as the nation's own possession and also foreign elements that could be harnessed to produce an inspiring effect as well as musical fervour. These patriotic songs have become classical and gone into history.

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## RELIGION

### (i) HINDUISM

Historical analogies and parallels suggest themselves much too frequently and often tend to obliterate distances in time and space. India, after Plassey, is thus known to have experienced the dawn of a new era—the era of Renaissance, “a Renaissance, wider, deeper and more revolutionary than that of Europe after the fall of Constantinople.”<sup>1</sup> She is also believed to have passed through the phase of “Reformation” and even of “Counter-Reformation”. Without pressing the parallel too far, it may be conceded that since the beginning of the nineteenth century India witnessed a steady growth of reawakened interest in the various phases of her own thought and culture in the context of the newly acquired contact with the Western culture. It involved a process of re-valuation and re-discovery, of an adjustment of norm through rejection of some ideas and institutions, and emphasis on others. Religion, which always occupied the predominant position in the people's life in India, reacted to this phenomenon very perceptibly.

The new attitude towards India's oldest religion and the religion of the bulk of her population to this day has been described as neo-Hinduism. This is a more convenient than correct nomenclature for the nineteenth century religious reaction in India. Neither the reformist nor the revivalist phase was by any means an exclusive feature of the nineteenth century India. It was but one of several such phases through which Hinduism, in the course of its evolution, across many centuries, passed.

Hinduism embraces such a comprehensive system deriving its sanction from diverse shastric sources and conventions, rituals and ceremonies as well as metaphysical thought of the highest conceivable order that it defies conformation to any rigid pattern except in so far as its hold on a particular sect or sects, or for a given period of time, is concerned. It influenced different categories of people in such diverse ways that its reaction on the community, known as the Hindus, as a whole, is difficult to assess.

Western scholars have found it difficult even to frame a definition of Hinduism<sup>2</sup>. Our study here is an attempt at evaluation of Hinduism in its essential, fundamental approach as understood by the enlightened leaders of the nineteenth century Bengal, and not so much in terms of its actual influence on the diverse units which constituted the commonwealth of religious systems known as Hinduism, described by Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan<sup>3</sup> as “a mosaic of almost all types and stages of religious aspiration and endeavour.”

The advent of the West in the modern age produced results which bear some resemblance with those the advent of the Crescent had brought





in the middle ages. On the one hand it stimulated a proneness to rigid conservation, on the other it prepared the ground for adaptation of the existing system to meet the challenge from the West. However contradictory these tendencies might have been, both had their roots deep in the spiritual and cultural traditions of the country. In both cases, rigidity ultimately yielded to adjustment through tolerance and understanding. In fact, Hinduism, when historically viewed, affords the example of a large synthesis achieved in course of many centuries. This gives Hinduism a character and distinctiveness all its own.

The first notable feature of the religious life in India in the early nineteenth century was the attempt made by Ram Mohun Roy to reform and revitalise the national life of his countrymen. In the course of an active public life spread over sixteen years (1814-1830) in India and three years (1830-1833) abroad, his reforming zeal made its influence felt on many aspects of India's problems. His title to greatness was derived from many efforts and achievements; one of his most heroic efforts was directed towards rationalising the religious life as led by his fellow countrymen. This he sought to achieve through conformity, in the main, to the teachings of the Upanishads, promotion of the contemplation of 'the Author and Preserver of the Universe and inculcation of the virtues of 'charity, morality, piety, benevolence and virtues' and strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds.

The urge to re-discover India's past, as understood by Ram Mohun and his followers in the generation after him did never amount to obscurantism. Its character was predominantly progressive and reformist. If it was bold enough to discard a slavish conformity to external ceremonies, mostly derived from conventional usages, not inherent in any system of fundamental religious thought, it was also realistic enough to comprehend the value of a synthetic approach to the entire problem. Thus Ram Mohun proclaimed a universal house of prayer open to all men without any distinction of caste or colour, race or nation.

The Brahmo Samaj movement whose rise is the subject matter of the next section is cited as an instance of a movement favouring serious religious reforms in India from the late twenties of the nineteenth century. So too was the Prarthana Samaj movement which did not, however, hold out any prospect of propagation in Bengal where deep-rooted traditions of Bhakti cult held firm sway and the seeds of religious reformation, sown earlier, had already begun to bear fruit.

Two years and a half intervene between the passing away of Ram Mohun Roy and the birth of Ramakrishna. The movement which owed its origin to the inspiration of the seer of Dakhineswar has been cited as an example of 'Full Defence of the Old Religions' by J. N. Farquhar<sup>1</sup>. He draws a distinction between the movement started by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj, and the movement initiated by Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886). In Farquhar's opinion, while the former was a defence of the old, tempered by reform, the latter



was a full defence of the old in almost every particular. Such a distinction is, however, partly correct and, as such, to a certain extent, misleading. It is true that Ramakrishna did not believe in picking and choosing; he had no reason for despising the past and no desire for compromising with the present. But the stream which flowed from Dakshineswar was by no means opposed to reform or blind to the potentialities and value of synthesis. Rather synthesis was its very life. It is true that in the seventies of the last century a conscious and sustained effort was made in some quarters to establish and justify "the superiority of Hinduism over all other forms of faith." Indeed this was the topic of a lecture delivered by Raj Narayan Bose in 1872<sup>5</sup>. It is also a fact that in 1873 was formed in Calcutta the *Sanatan Dharma Rakshini Sabha* or an Association for the Defence of the Eternal Religion. The efforts of Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani were similarly aimed at a defence and justification of Hindu ceremonialism and image worship with all its implications. Such moves were obviously an answer to the problem created by the proselytising exuberance of the Christian missionaries on the one hand, and schism posed by the organisation of the Brahmos as a distinct congregation on the other. But to equate the outlook and activities of such associations and individuals with those which inspired Sri Ramakrishna's vision is to exhibit an incapacity to comprehend the nature and import of his teachings.

Gadadhara's transformation into Ramakrishnadeva is the edifying story of the pilgrimage of a heroic soul, full of passion for God and bent upon the realisation of Truth. A God-intoxicated man, without the so-called advantages of learning derived from schools, he was endowed by nature with a prophetic vision and an all-responsive mind. His passion for God was so intense and absorbing that he tried all the ways and teachings laid down by various forms of religion. He experimented with different faiths with the sole object of discovering the elements of enduring Truth. He studied the Koran and followed its prescribed rites. With equal enthusiasm he acquainted himself with the basic concepts underlying the Gospels of Christ and fashioned his life in accordance with the spirit of its precepts. With his unfailing energy he pursued all the forms of worship enjoined by the Hindu shastras. Then he became finally convinced of the supreme fact that 'a truly religious man should think that other religious paths also are paths leading to the truth.'<sup>6</sup> The spiritual truths realized by him enabled him to proclaim the unique message summed up as follows:<sup>7</sup>

"The sole aim of human life is to obtain God, that God-realisation can be proved by experiment, that all religions are true, that each man has to approach God in his own way, that men and women are essentially divine, that human relationship is best expressed in terms of service or worship and that it is better to make positive efforts for progress than to be sorrowing over sin and moral lapses".

The transition from Ram Mohun to Ramakrishna was a phenomenon



of tremendous importance. In his desire to reform Hinduism Ram Mohun was largely influenced by the doctrines of the Upanishads. They supplied him with the justification of rejecting the Hindu pantheon in favour of a *nirguna, nirakara, Brahman*. This admirably suited the needs of the hour, (for the Christian missionaries and the rational atheists were making capital out of worship of idols) as well as his own convictions which were largely moulded by contact with Islamic and Christian theology on the one hand, and the acquaintance with the treasure-house of the Upanishads on the other.

This attitude no doubt served a historical purpose. By rationalising Hinduism mostly conceived of by the mass as a bundle of ceremonials and worship of images, and practised as such by them, Rammohun did much to rehabilitate Hinduism and thereby provide itself with a justification against organised attacks led by the Christian missionaries and the over-enthusiastic atheists. His efforts no doubt satisfied intellectual curiosity to a large extent, but it failed to strike any emotional chord in the minds of the people at large. He did not think in terms of a system comprehensive enough to include non-Upanishadic texts and matter (except at a much later stage); as a matter of fact, his system did not pervade the entire universe of the Upanishads even. People brought up for generations in the traditional cults and beliefs did not feel drawn to it *en masse*. A more dynamic, pervasive and cosmopolitan credo was called for.

Herein lay the historical need and justification of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Its basis was firmly rooted in the soil of the country. It was excellently suited to the climate of its temperament. It was catholic enough to comprehend all phases of traditional religious thought and spiritual discipline. Its keynote was Realisation—the quintessence of Hindu religious thought—born of the conviction that the highest truths of religion are realisable even in this life and that religion consists in 'realisation, not in reasoning about its doctrines but in experiencing it.' The means may differ, practices may vary, creeds may be diverse, but these do not matter so long as they help men to reach the destined goal of Spiritual Realisation. Those who came in contact with Ramakrishna, irrespective of the religious sects to which they belonged, not necessarily confined to the rank of the Hindus, could say, as M. K. Gandhi said later :

"The story of Ramakrishna Paramhansa's life is the story of religion in practice. He is a living embodiment of Godliness. His sayings are not those of mere learned man, but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations from his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist."<sup>2</sup>

It was no accident that not only the proclaimed seekers after spiritual truth but also the imperious intellectuals found in him the fulfilment of their quest. In fact the chief instrument of the propagation of his teachings—the future Swami Vivekananda, the St. Paul of the Messiah—had started his career as a relentless advocate of Radical theories bordering on rational atheism—'a Vedantist-cum-Hegelian-cum-Revolutionary.' as Sir Brojendranath Seal, one of his class fellows, described him. After



his transformation at the touch of the Great Master, Vivekananda went on propagating the gospel which has been described as "the creed of the Universal Man and the absolute and inalienable sovereignty of the self,—the combination of two ancient Hindu doctrines of *Jnana* and *bhakti*" or in western terms it was combination of an absolute monism which affirms that all is one, and at the same time of a devout approach to a God who can be worshipped. His own words—"Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divine within by controlling nature, external and internal"—are reminiscent of his Master's teaching—"He is born to no purpose, who having the privilege of being born a man, is unable to realize God in this life."

Narendranath Datta (as he was known then) paid occasional visits to Dakhineswar since 1881 and within five years of his first visit the Great Master was laid to rest. But the spell of five years was sufficient to transform the imperious youth into Swami Vivekananda of imperishable fame. Not content with the foundation of a monastery of fellow-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, he made it his life's mission to carry his Master's gospel to the hearts of his countrymen. "The first work that demands our attention", he wrote, "is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our Scriptures, in our Puranas must be brought out from the books and scattered broadcast all over the world." The all-consuming fire of his ardour led him to undertake extensive tours in and beyond India. His convincing discourses eloquently delivered made the westerners appreciative of the great potentialities of India's spiritual message. Religion, to him, was not a mere metaphysical speculation, divorced from the context of material or social realities. A staunch believer in Sankara's doctrine of non-dualism Vivekananda dedicated himself to the mission of uplifting humanity to the status of Godliness through realisation of inherent attributes in manhood and by elimination of the evils of poverty, ignorance and social injustice in every conceivable form.

No one had done in recent times more than the Master and his disciple to bring about a spiritual regeneration in India by imparting to Hinduism a new vigour, a distinctive character and a reinforced moral sanction. What was in the days of Ram Mohun, an approach or an attitude, ripened under Ramakrishna-Vivekananda as a philosophy and aspiration.

The nineteenth century not only saw the spiritual revitalising of Hinduism; it also witnessed the study and interpretation of Hinduism as an intellectual discipline. It found its ablest and most vigorous champion in Bankimchandra in whom the best elements of the Renaissance and the Reformation were happily blended. If he was a Revivalist, so far as his attitude towards Hinduism is concerned, he was no blind devotee of traditionalism, but a refreshingly progressive interpreter of Hinduism as a basis of philosophy and religion.

In an article entitled '*Dharma Ebang Sahitya*'<sup>10</sup> Bankim lashed out at those self-constituted guardians and interpreters of Hinduism who indenti-



fied it with ceremonialism above everything else. His concept of Dharma, elaborately discussed in his numerous articles composed between 1886 and 1895 reveals a distinct stage of evolution. His early admiration of positivist philosophy and Benthamite outlook gradually began to wear off till it yielded place to a deep veneration for the *Srimad Bhagabat Gita* in which he found 'elaboration of the embodiment of the highest concept of religion'. Utilitarianism to which he was deeply attracted earlier, now appeared to him to be one of the many attributes, and a small one at that, which went to the making of Dharma in the sense in which he understood it. True religion, as he conceived it, emanates from *chitta-suddhi* or purification of soul<sup>11</sup> and love of humanity.<sup>12</sup> His belief in Godliness was not an abstract or mere metaphysical speculation ; he was convinced that such an ideal or status was realisable even within mortal human frame. Sri Krishna who forms the theme of a lengthy, learned and penetrating discourse, entitled *Krishna-tattva*, in his considered opinion, had proved in real life the realisation of the ideal of Godhood in man. This brought the preeminent intellectual to a remarkable proximity with the lesson of Realisation such as Ramakrishna, the high priest of mystic emotional spiritualism, had preached and demonstrated in his own life.

Bankim's attitude towards the Upanishadic doctrine of *nirguna Brahman* and *Atman* or the conscious Essence diffused throughout the universe was undoubtedly one of respect. The concept of an infinite, formless and all-pervasive Brahman or of an Impersonal God (or the 'Inscrutable Power in Nature' as conceived of by Herbert Spencer) was an attractive speculation. But to Bankim's pragmatic thinking it was not enough by itself. It was calculated to serve the interest, and even meet the demands of intellectualism ; but it could hardly be expected to stir the depth and understanding of the average individual. In *Dharma-tattva*<sup>12</sup> he writes that in the concept of a nirguna, infinite Brahman, religion does not, and cannot find its complete fulfilment. A mere 'philosophical' or 'scientific' God, as distinct from Personal God, cannot be the object of purposeful worship. With its obviously limited capacity for knowledge, the human mind however informed, cannot be expected to fully comprehend the Eternal or Absolute *Brahman*. Hence the essentially pragmatic mind of Bankim turned from the ethical doctrines of Vedantic philosophy and saw that the Mahabharata, or to be more precise, the Gita, dealing with the problem from a more practical and utilitarian point of view, was a more dependable guide of man's quest of Truth and Fulfilment. To him the worship of a Personal God, as distinct from the Absolute Brahman such as the Upanishads proclaimed and Sankara propagated, was much more meaningful. The belief in a Personal God attended with devotion (*bhakti*) and *anusilan* (or proper and systemetic cultivation and integration of human faculties) and expressed through right action, held out, in a much more effective manner, the prospect of man's ascent to Godhood, than the concept of *nirguna* and *nirakara* Brahman. That such an ascent is realisable in real life is, in his opinion, amply



demonstrated in the life of Sri Krishna, the ideal embodiment of the divine in human shape.

But this advocacy of the worship of a '*Saguna Isvara*' did not mean a reversion to the traditional view of Hindu pantheon with all its emphasis on ritualism and worship of idols representing various concepts of divinity. Bankim was well aware of the encroachments often made by the *sashtras* and usages or *desachara* on the province of true religion.<sup>13</sup> In his discourse on *Srimad Bhagavat Gita*<sup>14</sup> he dwells at length on the theory that the worship of numerous divinities as practised by the mass, in conformity with the Puranic maxims, though considered as an inferior form of worship by the protagonists of the Vedic religion, need not be condemned as being entirely devoid of any merit. Its justification arises from the fact that these deities are but the manifestations of one Universal God—*Isvara*. He discusses the theme more elaborately in his treatise entitled *Devatattva O Hindu Dharma*.<sup>15</sup> The worship of deities as manifestations of God, he argues, is understandable only so long as it originates from the consciousness that these objects of worship are but the manifestations of the One Supreme Being, the source and giver of all power—*Isvara*. But he had the practical sense to realise that the *Loukik dharma* or the traditional form of religion which sanctioned the worship of various deities could not be easily eliminated. Hence he sought and found comfort in the teaching of the *Gita*<sup>16</sup>—"Even those who are devotees of other gods, worship them with faith, they also sacrifice to Me alone, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), though not according to the true law."

Thus Hinduism, as Bankim understood it, was intended to steer clear of the two extremes—the Upanishadic ideal of Absolute, Infinite Brahman on the one hand and the cult of the worship of the Puranic pantheon on the other. The ideals of Hinduism, as interpreted by him, were best represented by the teachings of the *Gita* with its emphasis on the concept of a *Saguna Isvara*, the One and Supreme Author and Dispenser of the Universe. In *Dharmatattva*<sup>17</sup> he observes that while it is not possible at the primary stage, at any rate, for a worshipper to properly comprehend the ideal of an Absolute and Infinite Brahman, it is possible to cite examples of men raising themselves to the status of Godhood. The best example is furnished by Sri Krishna. Such a conception of God in man is calculated to bring God within the comprehension of an average individual. In so far as Bankim rationalised Hinduism by stripping it of the incubus of ceremonialism on the one hand and by providing it with a living faith in a God Incarnate on the other, he may be said to have imparted a new vigour and outlook to Hinduism, already revitalised in the generations intervening between Ram Mohun and Vivekananda.

Looking at the period from Ram Mohun to Vivekananda it would appear that the so-called neo-Hinduism, in its essential features, was but an attempt at re-stating, with varied emphasis, the fundamental attributes of Hinduism. Such a phenomenon was largely the outcome of the interaction of new forces, both from within and from without, which had begun



to emerge in the wake of the advent of the West. This advent meant more than an alien rule (alien rule was, in fact, in existence for more than five centuries before the advent of the British as the ruling power in India). It meant, what is more important to note, the advent of an outlook which, in many respects, was an anti-thesis of the one that the Indians were accustomed to cherish and value. It is commonplace to suppose that the urge for properly interpreting Hinduism, as an integral unit of Indian culture and civilisation, was felt primarily because of two major considerations. These were (i) to meet the challenge of evangelicism of the western missionaries and (ii) to supplement and carry to its logical conclusion the work of religious reformation initiated by Ram Mohun Roy. Its aim was to provide Hinduism with a justification and Faith through re-emphasising its fundamental teachings which had lost much of their appeal to the popular mind, long accustomed to identifying religion with ceremonialism, God with image<sup>18</sup> and social usages with religious sanctions. A study of the movement in this wider perspective would reveal it as an instance of India's response to the new intellectual forces which had been steadily at work in the world of the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

It is possible to trace some elements of loyalty to tradition and even of orthodoxy in the nineteenth century religious movement in Bengal. Bipin Chandra Pal<sup>20</sup>, for example, recalls the efforts of the Revivalists like Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani and Krishna Prasanna Sen, directed towards justifying the various forms of Hindu ceremonialism and socio-religious cults and institutions. But they, as was only to be expected, merely touched the surface and did not go deep enough. Of much greater importance was the work of Bengali litterateurs, Nabin Chandra Sen and Bhudev Mukhopadhyay. They represented the western educated, middle-class, intellectual reaction to the impact of Western science and philosophy on India's religious ways and outlook. While Nabin Chandra attempted a reappraisal of Hindu scriptures in the light of western humanism, Bhudev decried reforms born of mere imitation and advocated the retention of the traditional Hindu pattern of society as an essential condition of social security and contentment. Bankim was a class apart. He was no upholder of the old system and subjected it to the severest tests of rationalism. And yet he has not unoften been described as an advocate of Hindu revivalism.

But this is merely a part and a minor part of the movement which convulsed the religious world of Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Individuals concerned with this aspect of the movement were at best Intellectuals or Rationalists who attempted to analyse and assess the current religious beliefs and practices so as to either justify them from the point of view of orthodoxy or to rationalise them after the fashion of the Intellectuals. To them it was a mere approach or attitude. But what started as an approach soon developed into a creed and under the impact of the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda the religious



world of Bengal and indeed of India, underwent a phase of remarkable transformation. Its appeal was so pervasive and forceful that it could not only absorb the shock of religious non-conformity but make its influence felt in the total life of the people—its religion, literature, philosophy and even politics.

## REFERENCES

1. History of Bengal, Vol. II—Sir Jadunath Sarkar (Ed.), Dacca, 1948, p. 498.
2. "Under the general term Hindu are included classes whose belief, ritual and mode of life are strangely diverse—the learned Brahman, who is a follower of the Vedanta philosophy, the modern theist or agnostic, trained in the learning of the west, the semi-barbarous hill man . . . who knows little of Brahmanical mythology" (Crooke, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 6 p. 698).
3. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Oxford, 1939, p. 313.
4. *Modern Religious Movements in India*, New York, 1915 p. 186.
5. *History of Brahmo Samaj*, Sivanath Sastri, Vol. I, p. 248.
6. *Ramakrishna*—Maxmuller, p. 153.
7. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*—Swami Gambhirananda, Calcutta, 1957, p. 3.
8. Quoted in the Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. II, p. 453.
9. "Ramakrishna was all Bhakti without, but within he was all Jnana. I am all Jnana without, but within my heart it is all Bhakti".—Quoted in *Swami Vivekananda on Himself*, Calcutta, 1963, p. 53.
10. *Prachar*, Pous, 1292, B.S.
11. *Vividha Prabandha*, IIInd part, Priti.
12. *Dharmatattva*, chap. IV, Manushyatva Ki, Bankim Rachanavali, Vol. II, p. 593.
13. His letter to Maharaja Kumar Binay Krishna Deb Bahadur dated 27th July 1892 reads: "I venture to think that Hinduism is not exclusively confined within the Dharma sastras, Hinduism is catholic in its scope. In the hands of the saintly authors of the Smritis, especially in those of the modern Raghunandana and others like him, it has shrunk into narrowness. Quoted in P. Sinha—*Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History*—Appendix C, p. 158.
14. *Dharmatattva*, Chap. III, p. 754.
15. Section entitled, 'Hindu Dharme Isvara Bhinna Devata Nai', p. 821.
16. *Gita*, ix, 23, *Prachar*, Vol. II, p. 274-278.  
     ye'py anyadevatābhaktā  
     yajante śraddhayā 'nvitāh  
     te'pi mām eva Kaunteya  
     yajanty avidhiparvakām  
         *The Bhagavadgita, Chap. IX, 23.*
17. *Dharmatattva*, Chap. IV, Bankim Rachanavali, Part II, p. 593-594.
18. It is interesting in this connection to note the enumeration by Bipin Chandra Pal of three stages of religious evolution concerning the Hindus—(a) the stage of *Perception* in which the men (of the Vedic age) worshipped gods cognisable by the senses; (b) the stage of *Reflection* represented by the Upanishads which shifted the emphasis from the seen to the unseen and (c) the *Imaginative* stage which was wonderfully developed in the Puranas which taught men to seek reconciliation and synthesis between the two necessary aspects of the physical and mental life. He concluded: "Pauranic Hinduism, all its popular misconceptions and misinterpretations notwithstanding, is a much fuller vehicle for the religious life than the Hinduism





of the Upanishads. And because the mythology or *Devabada* of the Puranas developed after the Hindu mind had passed through the experiences and disciplines of the reflective religion of the Upanishads, it would be unreasonable to place the Pauranic gods and goddesses in the same category either as that of our own Vedic Gods or as that of the gods and goddesses of what is called primitive culture. *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. I, B. C. Pal—Mythological Hinduism, p. 93-94.

19. Referring to Europe at the beginning of the 19th century it has been observed "Even in the Established Churches a tendency to give rational explanations of miracles, the Resurrection and the existence of God was not unknown". *Europe and the Modern World*—Gottschalk and Lach, Vol. II, Introduction, p. 87.
20. *Memories of My Life and Times*, Vol. I, p. 437-439.



## (ii) BRAHMO SAMAJ

The history of the movement leading to the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj (correct transcription Brahma Samaj) in 1828 is intimately linked up with that of the individual career of its founder Rammohun Roy (1772-1833). Born in the village Radhanagar in the district of Hooghly, West Bengal, of wealthy and orthodox Bramhin parents, he received in his boyhood the traditional education of his country and soon attained remarkable proficiency in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. Later in his life he learned English, Greek, Latin and Hebrew. His academic endeavours enabled him to acquire a profound knowledge of Islamic theology. A study of the Quran in the original shook his faith in the popular idolatrous form of Hindu worship and made him a life-long admirer of the uncompromising monotheism of Islam. He was further deeply impressed by the free-thinking and universal outlook of the rationalists (Mutazali) and the unitarians (Mawahhdin) of Islam. Subsequently with the progress of years and maturity he became enamoured of Sufi mysticism which has found so poignant an expression in Persian poetry and in which he must have discovered certain basic tenets comparable to those of the *Vedanta*. Acquaintance with the *Upanishads*, the *Brahmasutras* and the *Gita* convinced him that the concept of the unity of Godhead was the essence of Hinduism and the current idolatrous worship was only a disgusting aberration of later growth. Another section of the Hindu scriptures that he studied extensively, probably under the celebrated contemporary anchorite Hariharananda Tirthaswami, was the *Tantra*. An early visit to Tibet possibly gave him some insight into the principles of Mahayana Buddhism as well as into its later decadent phases. During his service career in Rangpur (1809-1815) he came in contact with a number of Marwari merchants of the Jaina faith, got interested in Jainism and is said to have studied "*the Kalpasutra* and other books appertaining to the Jaina religion". He had also some familiarity presumably due to his travels and stay at Banaras as well as through a complete mastery of the Hindi language, with the masters of the Hindi language, with the medieval Indian *bhakti* movement. He claimed medieval saints like Kabir, Dadu, Nanak and others as among his spiritual ancestors. His study of Indian and Islamic philosophical and religious thought movements was thus laborious, comprehensive and almost in all cases first-hand. A competent knowledge of several European languages gave him an easy access to the world of western learning and enlightenment. It is possible to trace the stages in the progress of his investigations in this field as well as the influences he succeeded in assimilating therefrom. While at Rangpur he developed admiration for the two great contemporary mile-posts of progress, the War of American Independence and the French Revolution of 1789. Naturally his studies at this stage were directed





to the literature of rationalism and enlightenment that inspired the great historical movements. 'The literature of empirical philosophy from Bacon to Locke and Newton as well as the propaganda of free thinking and "Illumination" in Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Valney, Tom Paine and others' formed his favourite subjects. His enquiries into the basic dogmas of Christianity started probably a little later after his final settlement in Calcutta in 1815. The knowledge of Greek and Hebrew enabled him to read the Christian scriptures in the original. To this he added a wide knowledge of Church history "with special reference to the Arian, the Sabellian and the Pelagian controversies" as also of 'the movement of liberal thought and ethical rationalism, Rabbinical writings of the first century before Christ especially in reference to the Tarjums of Jonathan and Hillel.' Mainly during the third decade of the nineteenth century Rammohun came in close contact with English utilitarian thought as represented by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. Apart from theoretical studies, personal contact and friendship with representatives of utilitarianism in India and England (including Bentham himself) must have facilitated his enquiries into this branch of contemporary western thought. Finally before his death he found time also to study at least some forms of socialist thought and movement including one propounded by Robert Owen. Mr. Recorder Hill, who was present at an interview between Rammohun and Owen in England, expresses his admiration of the former's close acquaintance with the literature of socialism. His life-long endeavours had thus enabled Rammohun to gain intimacy with both the rationalist and spiritual traditions of European thought. During his mature years he had sought to give expression to the philosophy of synthesis and harmony born out of a comprehensive assimilation of eastern and western thought through the medium of the Brahmo Samaj.

Rammohun was a man of deep religious conviction from his childhood. His early study of Islamic theology had made him a convinced monotheist and an acquaintance with the literature of Islamic and European rationalism had gradually led him to the position of a Deist. This attitude is clearly reflected in his early Arabic-Persian tract entitled *Tuhfatul Muwahhidin* (1803-04) in which he brands scriptural authority, priestcraft, ritualism, superstition and sectarianism as non-essential and irrational factors responsible for the degeneration of true religion. The latter consists, according to him at this stage, of unalloyed faith in the existence of a Creator and Moral Governor of the universe as well as in a spiritual principle in man called the soul. A study of the Vedanta as expounded by Sankara, however, gradually led him away from Deism to a more lasting foundation of his faith. He came now to hold a theistic view of the world and world history and categorised 'reason' 'scripture', and 'common sense' as collectively constituting the foundation of religious belief. In his own interpretation of the *Vedanta* he has been deeply influenced by Sankara and mainly sticks to the latter's position except on three points viz. (a) he has laid much greater emphasis on upasana (prayer and



and adoration) ; (b) he declares *brahma-jnana* and *moksha* (final liberation) to be within reach of house-holders (*grihastha*) and no monopoly of world-renouncing hermits ; and (c) he assigns a much prominent role to *maya* as the creative power of God probably under the influence of the *saktivada* of the *Tantra* which he had studied extensively. As one who in spite of his adherence to *Advaita-vedanta* had placed the greatest possible emphasis on the temporal world and the individual, Rammohun needed a comprehensive scheme of ethical values to guide our social behaviour and here he drew inspiration from the moral precepts of Jesus Christ though the metaphysical doctrines of Trinitarian Christianity appeared to him as scarcely better than popular Hindu idolatry. Religious to the core, he had not accepted the godless ethics of the utilitarians or Robert Owen's programme of social change minus religion, though as a philanthropist he had nothing but warm approval of the ideal of service to humanity advocated by both the schools of thought. The ideal of service was always an integral part of Rammohun's concept of religion and had already found expression through his various endeavours for social, educational and political reforms. The foundation of the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 brought to a focal point this comprehensive scheme of religious, social, intellectual and political transformation of India as visualised and formulated by him.

The Brahmo Samaj gave a concrete expression to Rammohun's concept of Universal Theism. From the organisational point of view this goal was reached through successive stages. The discussion-meetings and controversies which he used to hold with friends and orthodox Hindu and Muslim critics at Rangpur (1809—1815) indicate that his characteristic attitude to religion had already taken a definite shape and these may be accordingly regarded as the earliest foundation stone of the future Brahmo movement. After having settled in Calcutta in 1815 he started an organization named *Atmiya Sabha* originally at his Manicktala residence along with a number of friends who held liberal views on religious and social matters, like Dwarkanath Tagore, Brajamohun Majumdar, Haladhar Basu, Nandakishore Basu, Rajnarayan Sen, Brindaban Mitra, Baidyanath Mukherjee, Raja Kalisankar Ghosal, Gopimohun Tagore and the anchorite Hariharananda Tirthaswami. Regular sittings were held alternately in the residences of different members. The proceedings usually started with recitations from the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* which were followed by discussions on the futility of idolatrous worship, evils of the caste-system, practice of *sati* and polygamy, the desirability of the introduction of remarriage of Hindu widows etc. The meetings terminated with religious songs. The *Atmiya Sabha* remained active in Calcutta from 1815 to 1828 and probably became extinct after the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj of which it was in very real sense a precursor. During the same period Rammohun was also very closely associated with the unitarian form of Christianity as represented in Calcutta by Rev. William Adam and a few other European (mostly Scottish) gentlemen and along with his friends





Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Chandrasekhar Dev and Tarachand Chakravorti took an active part in organizing the Calcutta Unitarian Committee (1821) and the British Indian Unitarian Association (1827). This unitarian contact had ultimately proved to be of considerable help to him in the task of organizing the congregational worship of his own church.

The Brahmo Samaj was launched into its eventful career on August 20, 1828 (the 6th Bhadra, 1235 B.S.) in Calcutta in a rented house belonging to Ramkamal Basu at 48 Upper Chitpore Road, Jorasanko. About two years later it was formally shifted on January 23, 1830 (the 11th Magha 1236 B.S.) to its new building at 55, Upper Chitpur Road which stands today as the historic house of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. The universal creed of the new Church is set forth in its Trust Deed which requires the Church "building, land, tenements, hereditaments and premises" to be occupied, enjoyed, applied and appropriated as and for a place of Public Meeting, of all sorts and descriptions of people without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner; for the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe, but not under or by any other name, designation, or title peculiarly used for and applied to, any particular Being or Beings by any man or set of men whatsoever; and that no graven image, statute or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait or the likeness of anything shall be admitted within . . . the building . . . ; . . . and that, in conducting the said worship and adoration, no object animate or inanimate, that has been, or is or shall hereafter become, or be recognized, as an object of worship, by any man, or set of men, shall be reviled, or slightingly or contemptuously spoken of, or alluded to, either in preaching, praying, or in the hymns or other modes of worship that may be delivered or used in the said message or building. . . ."

Tarachand Chakravarti, one of the leaders of the Young Bengal group, was appointed the first secretary of the Church. Weekly service was held originally every Saturday evening; later it had been transferred to Wednesday. The service consisted of three successive parts viz. recitation of the *Vedas* by Telegu Brahmins in a closed apartment exclusively before the Brahmin members of the congregation; reading and exposition of the Upanishads for the general audience; and singing of religious hymns. This would correspond exactly to the reading of the Bible, the sermon and the hymn of Christian worship. The parallelism was, however, confined exclusively to the outward form of congregational worship. The contents of Rammohun's Universal Theism were thoroughly Hindu in character. The reading of the *Vedas* EXCLUSIVELY BEFORE Brahmins does not apparently accord well with the universal and non-sectarian ideals of the new church as set forth in its Trust Deed. But the only custodian of the Vedic hymns in Calcutta at the moment was the orthodox Telegu Brahmin community and its members could not



be persuaded to recite the *Vedas* liberally before Brahmins and non-Brahmins alike. That the organizers of the congregation including Rammohun himself, had no objection to the reading of the *sruti* texts before the general audience, becomes clear from their agreeing to have the *Upanishads* read and explained before the entire body of worshippers. This part of the service was performed by learned Bengali Brahmins like Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagis and Pandit Utsavananda Vidyavagis who were free from prejudice unlike their orthodox Telegu counterparts. The general congregation often comprised men of different communities including Christians and Mohammadans and hymns of the service were sometimes sung by choirs of Eurasian and Moslem boys.

The establishment of the Brahmo Samaj like all Rammohun's other reforming activities drew forth angry protests from orthodox circles which soon set up the *Dharma Sabha* as a rival body under the leadership of Raja Radhakanta Deb. It championed the cause of narrow Hindu orthodoxy as well as opposed all the liberal movements sponsored by the founders of the Brahmo Samaj including the struggle for the abolition of Sati. The passing of Bentinck's regulation abolishing the evil custom in 1829 made the *Dharma Sabha* leaders furious. Rammohun, always under fire from the orthodox camp, henceforth became its special target of criticism, slander and ridicule. Two attempts were made on his life and he had to place himself constantly on guard against attempted assassination. Fierce controversies between the two camps rent the air in Calcutta and the neighbouring regions and the two weekly papers *Sambad Kaumudi* for the Brahmo Samaj and the *Samachar Chandrika* for the *Dharma Sabha* began to spit fire on each other. It is amidst an atmosphere of so much turmoil, conflict and bitterness that the Brahmo Samaj was born.

The character of the new church founded by Rammohun Roy has often been misunderstood. With the introduction of the ceremony of initiation into the Brahmo Samaj in 1843 the body had since gradually developed as a *sect* and historians have sometimes consciously or unconsciously made the mistake of surveying the entire Brahmo movement from the sectarian point of view. The formation of a new sect is, however, what Rammohun always tried to avoid and succeeded in avoiding to the last. The Brahmo Samaj, as he had tried to shape it, was a *congregation* or an *order* rather than a sect or a *community*. He conceived it mainly as a common platform for the numerous and often mutually hostile religious sects and dogmas of India—where these could discover the grounds of worship common to all religions and learn to be tolerant and respectful towards one another. By removing gradually the age-old mental barriers and inhibitions that have ever kept the religious communities separate in this country, this common congregational worship would provide India with a far deeper basis of national unity and integration than mere political and administrative uniformity could assure. The discovery of such an underlying unity amidst numerous diversities of





creed and ritual seems to have been Rammohun Roy's goal, at least as indicated by the Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj. He had further sought to strengthen his doctrine by making the ideal of love and service of humanity an essential part of his Universal Theism. These twin concepts of compassion and service found expression through all his reforming activities. It was, however, his belief that the reforming impulse must come from within the body social and it was not desirable to impose elaborate schemes and measures from outside particularly with the aid of law. This universal and completely non-sectarian character of the Brahmo Samaj as conceived and founded by Rammohun Roy makes it something radically different from the organization into which it was transformed in the days of Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen and Sivanath Sastri.

After the departure of Rammohun Roy for England (November, 1830) and his subsequent death there (September, 1833) the central body of the Brahmo Samaj gradually reached a moribund condition though its name, theology and social ideals continued to live among certain groups in and near Calcutta. Most of the associates of Rammohun now severed all connections with the infant church except Dwarakanath Tagore whose munificence, coupled with the single-minded devotion of Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagis, the first minister (acharya) of the Samaj, enabled it to survive the period of crisis till new life was infused into the Brahmo movement in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century by Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), Dwarkanath Tagore's eldest son. Debendranath had come into contact with Rammohun Roy in his childhood and had been educated in the latter's Anglo-Hindu School and later in the Hindu College. The spirit of western rationalism, disseminated through the teachings of the Hindu College, proved inadequate to solve his spiritual problems and the result was a period of almost intolerable spiritual agony and unrest which he graphically describes in his *Autobiography*. While passing through this "dark night of the soul" he happened one day to pick up a flying leaf of the *Ishopanishad* edited by Rammohun Roy. A perusal of the contents of the torn page brought him the long-sought solace. Afterwards a fuller acquaintance with the Upanishads destroyed his already shaken belief in the popular idolatrous form of Hinduism. He began henceforth to take a sympathetic and active interest in the Brahmo Samaj and started the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* in 1839 with the intention of propagating the "Knowledge of Brahma as established by the Vedanta" which is the "central truth upheld by all the Hindu scriptures." Debendranath formally joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1842 and was initiated into Brahmoism along with twenty other youngmen on December 21, 1843 (the 7th Poush, 1765 Saka).

Debendranath's interest in Brahmoism and the Brahmo Samaj found its earliest expression in the formation of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* in 1839, which soon became a common platform for the elite of mid-nineteenth century Bengal. Religious zealots like Pandit Ramchandra Vidya-



vagis, Debendranath Tagore and Rajnarayan Bose, social reformers and educationists like Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, rationalists of the calibre of Akshoy Kumar Datta, Rakhaladas Halder, Anangamohan Mitra and Kanailal Pyne, poets and litterateurs like Iswar Chandra Gupta, Pyari Chand Mitra, Kaliprasanna Sinha and Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Hindu college radicals like Tarachand Chakravarti, Chandrasekhar Deb, Ramtanu Lahiri, Ramgopal Ghosh and Sib Chandra Deb, scholars like Rajendralal Mitra and Ananda Chandra Vedantavagis—to name only a few—had united together for the first time, under the banner of the *Sabha* with a common ideal and programme. In fact with the formation of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* Rammohun Roy's religious and social views emerge in the life of the nation not in the form of a sectarian creed but as the embodiment of all-round progress. The unification of these diverse elements of the national life through the bond of *national monotheism* was an organisational achievement of no mean order and it reflects credit on the tact, foresight and earnestness of the young Debendranath. The era of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* (1839-1859) ushered in a significant and creative epoch also in the history of the Brahmo Samaj as an institution and in this field the spiritual and organisational genius of Debendranath Tagore found even a more concrete and constructive expression.

The first task of young Debendranath was to provide the infant church with a solid organisational machinery which it had lacked in the earlier phase. Originally, as Sivanath Sastri writes, there was in the Brahmo Samaj, "no fraternity of fellow-believers. Most of those who attended the services were idolators at home. There was no organisation, constitution, no membership, no covenant, no pledge,...Those who daily condemned idolatry and upheld the worship of God were not required to discountenance idol worship by their example or even to practise the habit of prayer" This was a source of worry to Debendranath and he sought to remove these defects by drawing up rules, rituals and ceremonials for the new church, the most prominent among these being the form of declaration to be signed by aspirants after membership, the system of initiation, compulsory payment of regular subscription and a revised form of divine service. On December 21, 1843 (the 7th of Paush, 1765 Saka) Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagis, the first *acharya* of the Brahmo Samaj, initiated twenty-one young men headed by Debendranath Tagore formally into Brahmoism. The initiated Brahmo was a new phenomenon in the history of the faith. This for the first time gave the Church a concrete institutional character and was the first step towards reducing it to a full-fledged sectarian body. A notable doctrinal change that took place in the Brahmo Samaj during this epoch was the abandonment of the belief in the infallibility of the *Vedas*. Rammohun Roy in his later years had shifted from the position of a deist and had come to accept the authority of the *Vedas* as well as the *all other scriptures* as the common fund of accumulated human spiritual experience of ages. Since the death of Rammohun, however, the church-service had been conducted by Brahmin



pandits like Ramchandra Vidyavagis and Iswarchandra Nyayaratna who in spite of their sincerity and zeal, did not share Rammohun's enlightened views and had accordingly given the Brahmo form of worship an almost orthodox Hindu character. It was widely believed that the Brahmo Samaj placed the greatest emphasis on the superior form of worship advocated by the *jnana-kanda* of the Vedas. It did not occur to the exponents of this view that this attitude would necessarily narrow down the scope of Rammohun's universalism and fasten the belief in the exclusive fallibility of the Vedas (as in the cases of all other Hindu sects) on the church. Down to 1847 Debendranath and his newly converted associates did not formally renounce this position. But rationalists like Akshay Kumar Dutta who had joined the Samaj as well as the members of the 'Young Bengal' group who had come to be closely associated with the body through the medium of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* challenged this concept on the ground of irrationality and ultimately after a great deal of deliberation and enquiry Debendranath was convinced of the truth of their standpoint. It was now formally decided that the basis of Brahmoism would no longer be the revealed scripture (*apaurusheya sastra*). Brahmoism came henceforth to be considered based on "the pure human heart illumined by spiritual knowledge born of self-realisation." This really brought about a silent revolution in the history of the new movement which was far-reaching in its effect. It freed the new faith from the shackles of an age-old convention that had been the sheet anchor of Hinduism from the earliest times and attracted all the progressive and enlightened elements of contemporary society to the new church. At the same time it gave a fresh impetus to that spirit of individualism which had been from the very start a characteristic feature of the religious quest of the modern age and consequently of Brahmoism. Subsequently this emphatic individualistic trend was to prove a stumbling block to the Samaj in its efforts to achieve social integration and co-operation within its ranks.

The abandonment of the belief in the infallibility of revealed scripture did not, however, minimise the great respect that Debendranath harboured in his mind for the Hindu scriptures, particularly for the Vedas and the Upanishads. The controversy over the question of the infallibility of the Vedas had led him to enquire more deeply into the contents and nature of Vedic theology. Four students were sent for this purpose to Banaras in 1845 to study the Vedas and in 1847 Debendranath himself visited the holy city to make a personal investigation into the matter. When ultimately he was led to the conclusion that there were many sections in the Vedas and the Upanishads which could not be reconciled to the dictates of reason he accepted it; but at the same time by 1849-50 he compiled in two volumes a magnificent selection from the Hindu sastras with his own comments and a Bengali translation and exposition, entitled *Brahma Dharma*, the first part of which has been specifically described as *Brahmi Upanishad* by him. Without being regarded as in-



fallible this work has come to be held in high veneration by all sections of the Brahmo Samaj and has ever since remained a source-book of Brahmoism. Of course it comprises exclusively those passages which according to the compiler could be reconciled to the modern spirit of rationalism and enquiry. In 1848 Debendranath also wrote the *Brahma-Dharma-Vijam* (The Essence of Brahmonism), four short aphorisms in Sanskrit, for the general spiritual guidance of the Brahmos. The last of these viz. "Worship consists of love of God and the performance of the work dear unto Him", has since become classic. It once more emphasised the ideal of service which Rammohun Roy was the first to harness to religion in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Regarding the form of initiation it may be said that from 1844 to 1850 Brahmos were initiated according to the rite prescribed by the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. Brahmin members had to discard their sacred threads at the time of the initiation. After 1850 this particular method was discarded. The form of public worship introduced by Rammohun Roy also underwent substantial changes during the period from 1843 to 1859. It started from an individual worship by reciting the *Gayatrimantra* ten times a day, and ultimately flowered into a full-fledged congregational worship with its well-planned and clear-cut sections including *archana*, *pranama*, *samadhana*, *dhyana*, *stotra*, *prarthana*, *svadhyaya* and *upa-sanihara*. Devotional songs formed an essential part of the church service as in the days of Rammohun. As the Brahmos had now come to form a compact social group, distinguished from the other contemporary sects, need was naturally felt for a body of rituals conforming to their monotheistic creed, that was to conduct their social and domestic ceremonies. Debendranath had to give his thought to this pressing problem also and ultimately he embodied the results of his labour in a very important book entitled *Brahmadharmer Anusthanapaddhati* (Rituals of Brahmoism) (1865) in which he laid down rules that were to guide the ceremonies of *jatakarma*, *namakarma*, *diksha*, *vivaha*, *antyeshti* and *sraddha* for the Brahmos. The formation of these rituals went a great way towards strengthening the cohesion of the Brahmos as a social unit.

Philosophically Brahmoism of Debendranath's day differs from the rigorous, unqualified monism of the earlier phase. Less intellectual and more spiritual in temperament than Rammohun, Debendranath had always a horror for unqualified *advaitism* which left little or no scope for *bhakti* or the spirit of devotion and adoration in a spiritual seeker. In this book *Atma-tattavidya* (1850-51) he appears as a strict dualist in firm opposition to absolute monism; his next publication *Brahmadharmer Mat-O-Visvas* (1860) brings him closer to a qualified form of monism; till at last his theological magnum opus *Brahmadharmer Vyakhyan* (published in three parts in 1861, 1866 and 1885) established him as a qualified monist, his final position corresponding to that of a Vedantin of the *Visistadvaita* or more properly of the *Dvaitadvaita* school. Debendranath thus deserves the credit of having laid the foundation of a spiritual philosophy to





which the Brahmo Samaj has remained more or less consistently loyal ever since.

The Brahmo movement now spread rapidly in the country and due to the impetus received from Debendranath and his associates and thanks to ardour and organising skill later displayed by his brilliant young disciple, Keshab Chandra Sen, the church had succeeded in establishing by 1872 altogether one hundred and one branches throughout India and Burma. It should be mentioned in passing that Debendranath and his associates who were leading the movement during the *Tattvabodhini* epoch, regarded the monotheism of the Brahmo Samaj as the best and the noblest phase in the development of Hinduism. Without denying the universal outlook of Brahmoism they were always eager to emphasise its special relations with Hinduism. The abolition of idolatry and superstitions according to them was a step towards the purification of the traditional faith.

The next phase in the development of the Brahmo Samaj centres round Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884) and his activities. At a comparatively young age he emerged, with the blessings of Debendranath, as an *Acharya* (the first non-Brahmin to be elevated to the position) of the Brahmo Samaj. He at once imparted a new vigour to the Samaj and generated in it so much apostolic zeal that its message rapidly spread to the remotest villages in Bengal. In 1864 he undertook extensive tours in the presidencies of Madras and Bombay and prepared the ground for the spread of the Samaj in southern and western India. By 1866 the number of Samajas in Bengal grew to be fifty. But for some time past serious differences regarding creed, rituals and the attitude of the Brahmos to the social problems of the day had arisen among the leaders of the Samaj which split up into two groups—the old Conservatives and the young Reformists. While the former were in favour of adhering to the old concept of Brahmoism, based mainly on the teachings of the Upanishads, the latter desired “not only to broaden the basis of Brahmoism by advocating new social ideals but also to apply the dry light of reason even to the fundamental articles of religious belief.” (Sivanath Sastri—*History of Brahmo Samaj*, I. 44). Keshab who led the younger group pressed for the abolition of polyandry, child marriage, and above all, of caste restrictions and demanded changes in the rites at the worship of ancestors, birth ceremonies and several other practices. The division persisted, baffling repeated attempts at reconciliation and came on to the surface towards the end of 1866 with the emergence of two rival associations—*The Calcutta or Adi Brahmo Samaj* consisting of the old adherents of the faith and the new order, known as the *Brahmo Samaj in India*. The latter came into full being on the 24th January 1868 under the initiative and leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen. Its inaugural message was one ardent faith. It proclaimed:

“To grant salvation the merciful God has sent His new faith of Brahmoism. The gates of salvation are wide open. He calls one and all ;



entrance through His Gate is free, no one ever returns disappointed ; the rich and poor, the wise and the ignorant all are equally welcome here". Keshab breathed a new spirit into Brahmoism which was shown to possess boundless catholicity, reminiscent of the ideals embodied in the Trust-Deed of the Brahmo Samaj. He combined a deep sentiment of *bhakti* with a mysticism born of the urge to harmonise all creeds and faiths. It transcended the limits of the Brahmo creed as prescribed by Debendranath and the old school and aspired to become a faith based on an appeal to universalism. The Gospel of Christ had an irresistible appeal for him ; to this was added the influence of Sri Rama Krishna with whom his acquaintance dates from 1875. The teachings of Sri Chaitanya and the technique of his preaching also made their influence felt on his mind and intellect, now dominated by the deep and joyful experiences of devotion and prayers. His ardour and piety, combined with the charms of a striking personality and oratorial abilities of an unusual kind, made a great impression on the contemporary age. Brahmoism went on gaining strength. Gradually its influence spread beyond Bengal and the message of the Samaj was echoed in other parts of India—notably in Bombay, Madras and the North Western provinces. Keshab's overwhelming *bhakti* and mysticism found their culmination in the proclamation of the *Nava Vidhan* or the New Dispensation in January 1880.

Keshab was now more than a preacher. He had become, in the eyes of many, a prophet. The founder of the New Dispensation died within four years of its birth, on January 8, 1884 at the premature age of 46. Yet within these brief years he had succeeded in letting loose a torrent of religious zeal deriving its strength from the common source of all religions. "His most valuable contribution to his age and race", observes Bipin Chandra Pal, "was his conception of the religious unity of the human race. This unity has been preached before him, no doubt, both in India, by Raja Rammohun Roy, and outside India, by one or two European philosophers. But this unity had been arrived at, in the previous attempts by what may be called the method of subtracting, by reducing all religions, so as to say, to their least common measure, which, therefore, left out of account all the higher and specific developments of the religious consciousness of humanity. Keshab Chandra Sen, with rare and marvellous insight, saw the fundamental error of this method ; and boldly declared the essential unity of religions not at the lowest and the simplest, but in the highest and most complex stages of their growth ; and interpreted their difference as these of different types of the same religious consciousness of the race. This is his greatest and most fruitful discovery in the domain of the science of Religion." (*Character Sketches—Keshab Chandra Sen*, p. 13).

But the great apostle of religious unity could not prevent yet another schism within the rank of the Brahmos. The lack of a proper constitution for the guidance of the Samaj as well as the episode of the Cooch Behar marriage in violation of Act 3 of 1872 (of which Keshab himself was an





advocate) were the weapons used against him. On May 15, 1878 the party, opposed to him and known as the secularists, convened a public meeting in the Town Hall and proclaimed the inauguration of the *Sadhram Brahmo Samaj*. The foundation of its place of worship was laid on the 11th Magh, 1800 Saka Samvat. Maharshi Debendranath and the veteran Raj Narayan Bose blessed its congregation. Its missionaries, headed by Sivanath Sastri, increased within the next few years, the number of existing Samajas by fifteen.

But the split in the rank of the Brahmos did much to weaken their organisation as a whole. Besides the emphasis placed on the essential and ultimate unity of all religions, taught alike by the leaders of revitalised Hinduism and of Brahmoism, tended to obliterate the distinction between the two. The story of Brahmoism, in its last phase, is the story of its progressive absorption within the older religion from which it had sprung. Through its emphasis on freedom of individual conscience and intensely rationalistic approach, Brahmoism infused a new spirit into the nineteenth century religious life of India and hastened the march towards social and political regeneration of the country.



### (iii) ISLAM IN BENGAL

(1757-1905)

#### 1. *Introduction : Spread of Islam in Bengal*

To understand the state of Islam in mid-eighteenth century Bengal it is necessary to look backwards. Unfortunately the religious history of medieval Bengal is yet to be written from a synthetic use of all classes of sources. True, the religion of Islam began to make headway in Bengal, consequent on and subsequent to the establishment of political Islam and no doubt there were forced conversions. But Bengal's contact with the Muslims, especially in the field of trade, colonization and missionary work, began much earlier than its conquest in the thirteenth century. Thus sometimes the missionary preceded the soldier, and the activity of the former was no less significant than that of the latter. In Northern India, the spread of Islam was largely confined to cities and urban centres; and few villagers, comparatively speaking, embraced Islam in spite of the efforts of some Muslim rulers. Even in the rural areas round Delhi or Agra, the Muslim population was not excessive, because Islam proselytisation was stoutly opposed by 'powerful Hindu tribes like the Jats and Rajputs.' In Eastern Bengal, on the other hand, Islam spread mostly in the villages. H.H. Risley held that the converts were recruited from the aborigines, judging from their manners and customs, physical appearance and retained caste distinctions. Those who embraced Islam came from different ranks in society, viz., the lower classes and occasionally from the higher as well.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries formed the heyday of the Sufi missionaries in spreading Islam in Bengal. In fact Bengal became a Sufi stronghold during the early medieval period. Meanwhile the religious life of the Hindus in Bengal, Orissa and even Assam, came to be electrified and transformed by a vigorous Hindu revival under the energetic Vaishnava preachers like Chaitanya (1486-1533), Nityananda and the development of a special theology by the *Sapta-Goswami*. Vaishnavism not only effected a moral reformation among the upper and middle classes but it proved to be the saviour of the poor. It influenced the medieval Muslim society in Bengal also, in as much as it tended to weaken the force of Islamic influences there, especially in the interior regions outside the chief urban centres. Further, it helped to create a new, popular but vigorous Bengali literature, centering round the two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which tended to influence Muslim society. Again, the propagation of Islam in Bengal had not been followed by a corresponding widening of knowledge of the religion among the masses of the people. The Muslim scriptures were in Arabic and were



not translated into Hindusthani or Bengali. Thus the mental background of the Bengali Muslim was more Hindu than Muslim. Bengali Muslims organized a literary movement under Sayyid Sultan about the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, to write in Bengali about the lives of the Prophet and saints. He wrote the *Nabi-Vamsa* to educate the ignorant masses in the essentials of the religion because "All the Bengalis do not understand Arabic. None understands the words of your religion. Everyone remains satisfied with (Hindu) tales. . ." (as he wrote in his *Wafati Rasul*).

## 2. *Characteristics of a popular Islamic religion in Bengal.*

Centuries of contact between the two communities had gradually led to the evolution of a popular religion in India, and especially in Bengal and Bihar, where the Muslim population was more numerous than in many other parts of India. Here the social and religious life of the Muslims, nay, the very outlook on life of the Bengali Muslims came to be profoundly influenced by Hinduism and marked by interpenetration of many local manners and customs of the Hindus, and incorporation of certain beliefs, rites and ceremonies which were inconsistent with the Quran. If there was no absorption, there was undoubtedly assimilation between the two communities. So great was the extent of this assimilation that the *Hidayat ul Mominin*, a Sayyid Ahmadi treatise of the early nineteenth century, observes that in India, more than in any Muhammadan country, Islam and *Kufr* had been mixed up like *Khichri*. Various factors were responsible for this remarkable transformation in Indian Islam. Converted Muslims remained wedded to their time-honoured beliefs, manners and customs. The Census Report of 1911 records the existence of communities which were "neither Hindus nor Muslims but a mixture of both." Aulechand (d. 1769), the founder of the Kartabhaja sect, in the Nadia district of Bengal, had as his disciples Muslims as well as Hindus. Gracin de Tassy speaks of this amalgam as a concession which Islam made arising from circumstances.

Saint Worship (Pirism) was perhaps 'the most important element of popular Islam in Bengal' in every town or village. This belief in saints and worship at their shrines did not originate in India but were imported from Afghanistan and Persia by immigrants along with their religious orders. But in India there were certain factors which facilitated the penetration of the concept of saint-worship into Muslim society. Gracin de Tassy held (1831) the saints (called in Hindusthani *Pir* or *Wali*) to be "substitutes for the Musulmans, in the place of the numerous gods of the Hindus. . . As amongst the saints, venerated by the Musulmans, there are some personages who professed the faith of the *Vedas*, so several of the Musulman saints of India, are venerated by the Hindus." To the converts the *Pirs* resembled the Tantric Gurus and their tombs and dargahs (shrines) were paralleled by the chaityas or stupas of the Bud-



dhists. The 'saints' of Islam established *dargah* and *khanqhas* deliberately on Hindu or Buddhist sites. The Sufis and Pirs were believed to possess supernatural power,—to give relief to the poor, destitutes and patients, to be present at different places at the same time, to rejuvenate the dead, or kill people and to foretell the future. By the beginning of the 19th century 'belief in efficacy of prayers to saints had become almost universal' among the Indian Muslims. Of the numerous tombs of the saints of all-India fame, some were specially venerated by people of Bengal and Bihar, e.g., Farid-ud-din, Saikh Nizamuddin of Delhi and Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti. Further there were patron saints associated with each province or each district. Of the numerous saints in Eastern Bengal, the following were comparatively more important than others, e.g.,

- (i) Shah Jalal of Sylhet (to be distinguished from Shah Jalal of Gaur and Pandua)
- (ii) Panch Pir
- (iii) Munnah Shah Darwish
- (iv) Khondkar Muhammand Yusuf of Sonargaon
- (v) Shah Wali Baghdadi of Mirpur
- (vi) Pir Badr of Chittagong
- (vii) Shah Jalal Dakhini of Dacca
- (viii) Adam Shahid of Vikrampur
- (ix) Shah Langar
- (x) Akhi Siraj ud din
- (xi) Alauddin Ala ul Huq
- (xii) Nur Qutb Alam
- (xiii) Chisal Ghazi
- (xiv) Badr ud din Badr i Olam
- (xv) Makhdum Shah Jalal and
- (xvi) Qutb Shah of Malda

Supporting and endowing dargahs was considered to be a pious act by the rich aristocracy of the land. The Muslim pilgrims to the dargahs, like their Hindu counterparts to Jagannath and Brindaban, came either for religious merit or fulfilment of vows or of worldly desires (children, health, fortune or honour). Worship of the dead Pir was paralleled by or even excelled by devotion to the living Pir. Every Pir belonged to a mystic order. The Muslim veneration for the living Pir (*Pir-i-Muridi*) had its counterpart in the pre-existing *Guru-Chela* relationship, Hindu reverence for the *Guru* or *Gosain*. The *Sijdah* (prostration of the *murid* to the *Pir*) was comparable to the *sastanga pranipat* of the Hindu chela to the Guru.

*Footprints*: Mosques containing the footprints of the Prophet (*Qadam Rasul*) as on the bank of the Lakhya, east of Dacca, may be compared to the Vishnupada temple of Gaya and *Dharma Paduka* in Burdwan district and the *mutawalli* to the Gayawal Brahman. The





*Qadam Rasul* building of Gaur exists today. The dargah of Shah Langar at Muazzampur containing his footprint attracted crowds of pilgrims. Monuments were erected over the relics of Ismail Ghazi at Pirganj in North Bengal.

Various mystic cults grew up in Bengal with traditions and legends round some Pirs and mythical personages of uncertain identity, which became very popular alike among the Muslims and Hindus. Khwajah Khizr was believed to have "discovered the source of the water of life", be an expert in prediction and the protector of marines from shipwreck. His festival (*Khawaj, Bera* or *Bhera*) was observed in *Bhadra* (Aug.-Sept.) by Muslims and Hindu boatmen and fishermen, floating lights on the water. This festival was celebrated by Sirajuddaulah and witnessed by William Hedges (1980-83) near Murshidabad on the Bhagirathi. It was also observed by the Nawab of Murshidabad in 1821. The name of one Pir Badr (as water god) was invoked by every sailor or fisherman before journey or during storm in Bengal. The legends centring round Zindah Ghazi, Ghazi Miyan and Sat Pir are similar and identification is difficult. The forests and rivers of Sundarbans being infested with tigers and crocodiles, the woodcutters, Hindu or Muslim, worshipped mythical heroes for protection from tigers and crocodiles,—Muhurra Ghazi in the 24 Parganahs, Zindah Ghazi on the banks of the Lakhya river in Eastern part of the Delta, Kalu Rai or Dakhin Rai (riding on a tiger) of the Hindus. Shrines dedicated to Muhurra Ghazi existed in every village in the 24 Parganahs. Before entering the forest or sailing on the water one must offer worship to the shrines, little earthen mounds, raised by Hindus and Muslims. On the banks of the Lakhya river in Eastern Bengal, two mounds represented the Ghazi and his brother Kalu. The manner and the articles of worship among the Hindus and the Muslims were similar. The followers of Shaikh Madar (Sayyid Badruddin Madar) were known as Madaris. The festival of Madar Jhanda was celebrated by the lower classes of Muslims and Hindus alike. Buchanan found numerous families of Madari faqirs in Purnea and Rangpur. Many Madaris dressed or were naked like Hindu Sannyasis and passed through fire like the Hindus. The worship of *Panch Pir* or Five Pirs, invoked to avert danger, was very popular among the Hindus and Indian Muslims, especially in Bengal and Bihar. The identity of the five Pirs is uncertain, varying in different parts of India. In Bengal, we hear of Manik Pir, Ghora Pir, Kumbhira Pir, Madari Pir, but there are no special ceremonies or festivals. James Wise found a *Panch Pir* shrine of 5 unfinished tombs in Sonargaon worshipped by Hindus and Muslims. It has been regarded as an example of fusion of Islam and animism, i.e., of 'Muslim hagiology grafted on animism.' The followers of this sect were called *Panch Piriya*s. This cult may be traced to the Five Pandavas of the Mahabharata or to five Dhyani Buddhas. In some West Bengal districts (Midnapur, Burdwan) the *Panch Pir* is worshipped even today. The mystics of Bengal in the 19th century were of two kinds, judged by



conformity or otherwise to the Shariah. The first type, whose practices conformed to it (*bashara'*, also *salik*), was more respected than the second (*beshara'*, also *mazhub*) whose practices did not.

The Indian Muslims had adopted the practices of Hindu asceticism, with numerous and bewildering groups of faqirs. Four major orders of such faqirs existed in Bengal by the 19th century,—Arjunshahi, Jalali, Madari and Benawaz, with numerous divisions and subdivisions. Jafar Sharif refers to a class of Shahajiya faqirs who dressed like women and sang and danced before their *murshid*. The growth of Mullaism or priestly influence is referred to in contemporary Bengali literature.

The religious life of the Sunni Muslims of Bengal was influenced not only by Hindu practices and beliefs but also by the Shiahhs. The Muhurram festival exercised an emotional influence on the Muslims, and this is reflected in the *puthi* literature, *zari gan* (or Bengali song) and pompous observances. The *Taziyah* processions held with pomp and splendour and grief, to celebrate the Muhurram in every Muslim village in Bengal and Bihar came to be regarded by the nineteenth century reformer as idolatrous and sacrilegious as they were similar to the Durga Puja or Rath Yatra processions. Similarly the mummeries in Imambaras also resembled Hindu practices. Out of 14,000 *taziyahs* in Patna and Bihar city 600 were made by Hindus.

As a result of long contacts between the two communities, the lower classes of both Hindus and Muslims came to have common objects of worship. Buchanan found such mutual worship among the Brahmans, Mullas and Faqirs and suspected that some qazis and pandits used to do so in Rangpur, while in Gorakhpur even Muslims of foreign origin and of high rank were influenced by Hindu practices through their womenfolk. In Bengal similar was the growth of the cult of Satya Pir (True Saint) and Satya Narayan (True God) among the Muslims and the Hindus respectively, without the use of any image. Among other rites and ceremonies were the birth day celebration of the Prophets (*Milad* or *Mawlud Sharif* or *Miland un Nabi*), the death annivary of *pirs* (*urs*) and rites for remembering dead relatives (*faith*). These ceremonies, unsanctioned by *hadis*, were non-Bengali in origin, being conducted in Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages even now. The life of an ordinary Muslim, like that of the Hindu from birth to death, was hedged within local customs and superstitions. The Indian Muslims' adoption of the Hindu belief in astrology was reflected in the growing importance and influence of the astrologer (*Najum* or *Najoom*) who came to be consulted by all, high or low, on all things, great or small. This is referred to by Mr. Meer Hasan Ali. Fear of evil spirits pervaded the mind of the Indian Muslims as described by Jafar Sharif. The goddess *Sitala* or goddess of small-pox, was worshipped in the Punjab, Bengal and other parts of India by the lower classes of the Muslims. They also had a great fear of *Matri* or *Umm i Sibyan*, a spirit which was believed both by Hindus and Muslims to cause convulsion to a child up to 18 months. The simplicity of Muslim





marriage ceremony came to be given up in favour of growing pomp and expensive displays, including music, dancing and drinking. The dowry system, denounced in Islam, invaded the Muslim society. The birth of a daughter was regarded as a burden both by Hindus and Muslims.

Islam teaches brotherhood and social equality. But the Indian Muslims came to imitate the caste distinctions of the Brahmans and the exclusiveness of the Rajputs. The earliest reference to social differentiations among the Muslims is found in *Inshai Mahru* (1353). Casteism came to have a "complete practical ascendancy" over the Muslims in certain areas and created subdivisions with prohibitions regarding inter-marriage and inter-dining. The Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans formed the *Ashraf* (aristocratic) class, but inter-marriage was unusual, not only among them, but even within the same order.

### 3. *Influence of Islamic Reform Movement of 18th Century on Islamic Revivalism in Bengal of 19th Century.*

Thus, after a lapse of several centuries and as a result of various forces—political, economic and social, and religious—some of which were natural and logical, Islam in India and especially in Bengal developed certain popular characteristics. All these, however, came to be regarded by orthodox reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries to be abuses or "innovations in religion and the mode of performing religious duty and worship", which must be shunned by every true Muhammadan, because they constituted aberrations from orthodox Islam. Thus Maulavi Ismail Haji found the Indian Muslims in early 19th century to be deeply plunged in the vices of 'shirk' or Association with God or at least heresy. The Quran and *Hadis* ceased to be their chief guides. The association of Islam with Kufr was thus commented upon by Sir Muhammad Iqbal: "Surely we have out-Hindued the Hindu himself; we are suffering from a double caste system—religious caste system, sectarianism and the social caste system which we have learned or inherited from the Hindus. This is one of the quiet ways in which the conquered nation revenged themselves on the conquerors."

To understand this attitude it is necessary to refer to the Islamic revivalist doctrines of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab in Arabia and Shah Waliullah in India, the two great thinkers of the 18th century. In the field of doctrine Wahhabism was "the first and still the strongest fundamentalist reaction in modern times to the spread of innovations and mystical tendencies among the mass of Muslims". Its followers claimed that they were "followers not innovators". They aimed at reducing Islam to a pure theism. They were Sunnis, following the school of Hanbal as interpreted by Ahmad Ibn Taimiya (d. 1328). In positive theological system they were unitarians (*Muwahhidun*) reviving emphasis on *tauhid* or unity of God which has two aspects: uniqueness as master of creating; uniqueness as entitled to worship. So syntheism, or association of anyone



and anything with God constitutes the greatest sin, which even God does not forgive and which justifies war against the sinners, even though Muslims. This restoration of Islam to its original purity meant—(i) rejection of all innovations (*bidat*), i.e., all beliefs and practices, outward forms and superstitious observances and ceremonies, introduced since the time of Prophet Muhammad and the early generation of righteous Muslims (*al-Salaf al Salih*): (ii) rejection of intercession, i.e., discarding all intermediaries between God and man, denunciation of the cult of and worship of saints, visitation of tombs and offering of prayers and appealing to them in emergencies as tantamount to polytheism (*shirk*) and equated with pre-Islamic paganism. Hence they were called the Puritans of Islam. They admitted the right of private interpretation (*ijtihad*) of the Quran and *Hadis* (Traditions) and hence of independent judgment, rejected the four orthodox schools of canon law, and adherence to their prescriptions (*taqlid*).

Sharply contrasted with the Wahhabis of Arabia stood Shah Waliullah (1703-62), one of the greatest Sufi philosophers of Islam in India, an encyclopaedic scholar of tradition, theology and jurisprudence and a moderate reformer, who taught devotion to the Sunna of the Prophet and the value of tolerance and compromise in interpreting the Holy Law. Waliullah's Islam was richer, more comprehensive, and more flexible than Wahhabism. In that age of political disintegration, moral collapse, sectarian conflict, socio-economic decay, Waliullah was responsible for the religious revival of Indian Islam. He tried to restore the unity of the Muslim community and create sound leadership. He also endeavoured to reconcile the differences between the Sufis over the question of monism coming down from the time of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi (*Mujaddid i Alf-i-Sani* 1563-1624). While counselling avoidance of rigidity in interpretation of religious injunctions, Waliullah endeavoured to establish pure monotheism and purge the Muslim society of all polytheistic and un-Islamic social practices, beliefs, customs, etc., which had grown up in Hindu environment, because the purity of Islam, its doctrines and values, must be maintained. Thus did Shah Waliullah seek to effect the moral and political regeneration of the 'decadent, demoralized, bewildered and disorganised' Muslim society in India.

European writers hold that the movements of Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareli and of Shariat Allah, Dudu Miyan, Titu Mir and Karamat Ali were nothing but Wahhabi offshoots in India and that Shayyid Ahmad was the apostle in India. Some modern scholars like Dr. I. H. Qureshi and Ikram have objected to this view and tried to show that the Indian Muslim revivalists were not Wahhabis. Others hold that the Indian movements were influenced more by Shah Waliullah than by Wahhabism. On the other hand, Dr. A. R. Mullick has used the term 'Indian Wahhabis' while Dr. Q. Ahmad has also written on 'the Wahabi Movement in India'. While it is true that there are some differences between the Arabian and the so-called Indian Wahhabis, the fact remains that some of the ideas





like rejection of the innovations and un-Islamic beliefs and practices, advocated by the Wahhabis and Shah Waliullah, were also emphasized in the 19th century purificationist religious reformation movements among the Muslims in India and Bengal.

#### 4. *Tarqah i Muhammadiyah of Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi in Bengal.*

Of all the reform movements in Indian Islam during the early 19th century that of Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi (1786-1831) and Shah Ismail Shahid (1782-1831) was unequalled in vigour, in the extent of the area affected and in the influence exerted. Its fortunes as a political force have been dealt with elsewhere in this volume. As a religious force it stirred the entire Indian Muslim society to its foundations. It was Bengal which largely supplied men, money and resources for the movement in the north-west, while Patna in Bihar formed its organisational centre. The fact that two near relations of Shah 'Abdul' Aziz, the nephew (Shah Muhammad Ismail) and son-in-law (Muhammad Abdul Hai), peerless learned men ('Alim Benazir), became the disciples of their illiterate (*Ummi*) co-disciple Sayyid, greatly advanced the movement. Patna became a permanent headquarters of the movement, with four Khalifahs (Wilayat Ali, Inayat Ali, Murhum Ali, Farhat Hussain), and one Imam (Shah Muhammad Husain).

An idea of the principal reforming tenets of Sayyid Ahmad may be had from the *Sirat ul Mustaqim* (or True Path), the *Taqwiatul Iman* (Support of the Faith), both written by Maulavi Muhammad Ismail, and the *Hidayet ul Mominin*, another Sayyid Ahmadi work. Most important were: (i) emphasis on the unity of God (*Tauhid*) and restoration of the simplicity of classical Islam and (ii) rejection of *shirk* (idolatry), which presupposes rejection of all innovations, superstitions and abuses pervading Indian Islam whatever their source. The *Sirat* bewailed the darkness overspreading the land: "Compare the state of Hindustan with that of Rum and Turan! Compare it even with its own condition two or three hundred years ago. Alas! where are now the Oulis and Ulama of those times? "If the Hindus have their Gyah, their Mathura and their Kashi, the Mahomedans have their Makwanpur, their Bahraich, and their Ajmer. The one set builds maths over their idols; the other, not to be behind hand, raise domes over their saints' tombs. In the maths you will find mahants and Gosains; at Mahomedan shrines, Khadims, Mujawirs and Pirzadas." Hence the *Taqwiatul Iman* exhorts: "Follow no one, be he mujtahaid, Imam, Ghaus, Kuth, Moulavi, Mushaikh, King, Minister, Padri or Pandit, against the authority of the Quran and the Traditions." "Follow the example of Mohammad of Arabia and relinquish all the usages of Hind and Sind, of Fars of Rum". Sayyid Ahmad termed his doctrine *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah* (The Way of Muhammad). The influence of his tenets was extensive, as they were intended to "awaken the sincerity of religious zeal and gratify the pride of Mahomedan feeling."



On the other hand they also roused much opposition as they struck at the root of long established customs, beliefs and practices. So henceforth the Muhammadans of India came to be divided into two parties. Those who did not accept the Sayyid's creed were called *Mushriks* (Polytheists). His opponents, consisting of orthodox *maulavis* and *khadims* and others, derided his followers as Wahhabis.

### 5. The Faraizi Movement

Nineteenth century Bengal witnessed a new Islamic religious movement in the hands of a few devoted local reformers and scholars in Eastern Bengal, collectively called the *Faraizi* sect, for their insistence on the performance of *faraiz*, i.e., obligatory duties enjoined in the Quran, especially the five fundamental institutions (*bina*). The *Faraizis* emphasized the performance of all religious duties. They availed of steamship journeys to Arabia and tried to introduce some Wahhabi ideas into India early in the nineteenth century, without calling themselves Wahhabis. This complex socio-religious movement was started about 1818, by Haji Shariat Allah (1781-1840), a Bengali Muslim belonging to a petty taluqdar family of Shamail village in Madaripur subdivision, visiting Mecca twice.

The Faraizi movement was the earliest and foremost of all other religious reform movements in Bengal. The Faraizis aimed at 'self-correction', enforcing the original teachings of Islam and purging the Muslim society of superstitious rites and ceremonies. To realise these objectives, the Haji formulated certain main principles. He replaced *Pir-i-Muridi* (a sinful innovation implying a complete submission of the disciple to the preceptor) by the relationship between *ustad* (spiritual guide) and *shagrid* (pupil). A would-be disciple had to express repentance (*tawbah* or *taubs*) for past sins and take a vow to lead a righteous and godly life in future. The formula, couched in Bengali language, was administered by the *ustad* without touching the *shagrid* (*istighfar* or *igrari baiyat*). Unity of God (*Tauhid*) was to be firmly practised, and His partnership must not be ascribed to any one else. This struck at the root of all beliefs, actions, resembling infidelity (*Kufr*), polytheism (*shirk*) and innovation (*bidah*). So all popular, un-Islamic rites and ceremonies, e.g., saint-worship, *urs*, participation in Muharram etc. were denounced. In consonance with the Hanafi law which decreed that congregational prayers of *Juma* and *Id* were not permissible except in *misr-al-jami* (i.e., where the administrator and the judge appointed by a lawful Muslim sovereign are present), he prohibited these in Bengal as British India was *Dar ul harb*, not *Dar ul Islam*. In this the Faraizis differed from other Muslims. With his puritanical attitude Haji Shariat Allah ruled that the socio-religious celebrations of the Muslims must be in strict conformity with Islam. On the social plane, the Faraizis denounced caste prejudices as a deadly sin, being contrary to the spirit of the Quran, and emphasized the equality of all members of the reformed creed. This





attracted the lower orders of the society, cultivators, weavers, oil-grinders, etc., chiefly in the villages. But their appeal was ineffective in towns and cities, like Dacca, Comilla and Chittagong, where the upper classes were influential.

It was remarkable that Haji Shariat Allah was the first in Bengal to denounce the various practices of popular Islam there and to rouse the Bengali peasant. He made various purges and sweeping reforms without much opposition or hindrance. But opposition came from two quarters, viz., the traditional or *Sabiqi* Muslims for his crusade against the time-honoured institutions,—*pirism*, caste prejudices and employment of the *dai* (mid-wife) caste ; and the zaminder or landowning classes for his emphasis on social equality. This twofold clash came to a head in 1831. But his movement continued, thanks to his caution and prudence, till his death. By his life-long mission Shariat Allah revived Islam in Bengal from its stupor. A contemporary writer estimated that one-sixth of the total Muslim people of Faridpur, Bakarganj, Dacca and Mymensingh districts, a vast majority of the uneducated and most excitable classes, were converted to his fold. It also spread to Tipperah. The success of his mission paved the way for Sayyid Ahmad.

The original Faraizi movement, lacking all political colour, did not attract much attention during the life-time of its founder. But under his son, Haji Muhammad Muhain (or Muhain ud din Ahmed), popularly known as Dudu (Dudhu) Miyan (1819-62). The sect came to be further consolidated and developed, and transformed from a predominantly religious to a religio-socio-economic-political body, a resistance movement of the Muslim peasantry of eastern Bengal against the Hindu landlords and European indigo-planters. Dudu Miyan was born at Mulfatganj in Madaripur sub-division of Bakarganj district (now in Faridpur) in 1819. He asked his followers to eat the detested common grasshopper (*phanga*) just as the locust (*tiddi*) was taken as food in Arabia.

The distinctive advance made by Dudu Miyan was his organization of a society. Asserting the equality of mankind, he put equal emphasis on the welfare of the lowly and poor and of the high and rich. In the absence of a legitimate Muslim government in Bengal, he tried to set up a community capable of discharging some of the essential functions of a communal life. He had a twofold aim. To protect the Faraizi peasantry from Hindu zamindars and European indigo-planters, he raised a volunteer body of *lathials* for affray parties. To secure social justice for the Muslims, he revived the traditional *panchayat* system. These two branches (*siyasi* and *dini*) were co-ordinated by an hierarchical Khilafat system under the direct control of the *Ustad*. He divided Eastern Bengal into circles (*halqas*), consisting of 300—500 families. He insisted upon every member's obligation to render mutual assistance in times of distress for which no action would be criminal or unjustifiable. He took upon himself the task of settling disputes, administering justice in a summary way. With an organised espionage system, working over Eastern Bengal, he kept



himself acquainted with everything. Terror tactics was effectively used. With his death at Dacca in September, 1862, ended the vigour of the movement. Dudu Miyan's name became 'a household word' throughout the districts of Faridpur, Pabna, Bakarganj, Dacca, Noakhali, Baraset, Jessore and Malda—almost in the whole of East Bengal and also in some areas of West Bengal. The thoroughness of the methods of the father and the son was testified to by the number of the Faraizis in 1927. Dudu Miyan's social reform would remain his most solid achievement and lasting contribution to the movement.

#### 6. *Influence of Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah on Bengal*

(a) *Titu Mir*: Practically synchronous with the Faraizi movement in East Bengal, was the mass movement of reformers, peasants and artisans in West Bengal villages, led by Nasr Ali alias Titu Mir (or Miyan) of Chandpur, south-west of Narkulbaria in Baraset district, a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad about 1827. His ideas of religious reform were similar to those of Shariat Allah and of Sayyid Ahmad, viz., emphasis on the unity of God and restoration of the original purity of Islam. Both Titu Mir and Shariat Allah came from lower strata of the Muslims in Bengal, and both were supported by the rural masses. Both conformed to the Hanafi School. But there were certain doctrinal and basic differences between Titu Mir and the Faraizis. While Shariat Allah held that the Friday and Id prayers were not obligatory in India, Titu and his followers (and also Karamat Ali) said these prayers. The religious reformer soon became the leader of 'an infuriated peasant rising', in three districts of 24 Parganahs, Nadia and Faridpur. The progress of the sect, however, roused the opposition of some Muslim peasants (especially the Hanafis) and Hindu zamindars. Starting as a religious movement it developed into a socio-economic struggle of the Muslim peasantry against the Hindu zamindars. Teaching passive non-cooperation among the masses by refusing to serve under the English and refusing to go to the English courts it became a religious, economic, political and communal movement.

(b) *The Patna School of Wilayat Ali and Enayat Ali*: After the death of Sayyid Ahmad in 1831, his movement was rescued by his Patna Khalifahs, Wilayat Ali and Enayat Ali of Sadiqpur family with their 'missionary zeal' and 'immense pecuniary resources'. But differences of opinion arose among the Sayyid's principal disciples over the relative emphasis on the two principles which formed the central feature of the Sayyid's doctrine, the emphasis on the Prophetic Tradition (*Ittiba-i-Sunnah*) and the rejection of the prescriptions of the Schools of Law (*Ittiba-i-fiqh*). Maulavi Wilayat Ali of Patna re-affirmed the principle of *Tariqah*, i.e., Prophetic tradition (in his book '*Amal bi'l Hadis*', probably written before 1837). Maulana Karamat Ali of Jaunpur refuted Wilayat Ali (in his book *Quwwat al Iman*, 1837), remained firm on *'aqlid* and followed the Hanafi school of law. Maulavi Abdul Jabbar of Calcutta, though a Hanafite, reasserted emphasis on Prophetic tradition, refuting





Karamat Ali and supporting Wilayat Ali (in his book *Taqwiyat ul Muslimin fi ittiba-i-Sunnat-i-Sayyid al Mursalin*, 1840). Hence Abdul Jabbar may be regarded as belonging to the Patna School. Thus arose a split in Sayyid Ahmad's sect between the School of the Patna Khalifahs and the *Taaipuni* School of Karamat Ali. In course of time a third group arose by leaving the Patna School, the *Ahl i Hadis*. "Indefatigable as missionaries, careless of themselves, blameless in their lives, supremely devoted to the overthrow of the English Infidels, admirably skilful in organising a permanent system of supplying money and recruits, the Patna Caliphs stand forth as the types and exemplars of the sect. Much of their teaching was faultless and it had been given to them to stir up thousands of their countrymen to a purer life and truer conception of the Almighty." (Hunter)

From the headquarters station of Patna radiated out numerous agents to preach *jihad* and collect funds, recruits and provisions. But it was Bengal which became the "chief field of propaganda and recruitment." Of course it took some time for intensive propaganda to stir the Muslims of Bengal and Bihar, long enjoying peace under British rule. But once stirred, their intellectual superiority prevailed and the movement became to a great extent a Bengali Muhammadan revival. In Bengal the Sayyid's Khalifahs and their agents were commissioned to work in jurisdictions of their own. The districts of Chittagong, Noakhali, Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur and Barisal in Eastern Bengal were the field of activity and touring of Maulavi Karamat Ali of Jaunpur. Central Bengal and especially the districts of Faridpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Maldah, Bogra, Nadia and even Baraset became the chief ground of Enayat Ali of Patna for more than ten years. During 1840-44 he made Hakimpur village in Jessore district his headquarters. He built mosques and appointed teachers (and 'Muhammadan Mullahs') to spread the creed and preached the *jihad*. Zainul Abedin, a Hyderabad convert, was commissioned to preach in the eastern districts of Bengal (particularly Dacca and Sylhet) and converted the peasantry of Tipperah and Sylhet. The effort of Enayat Ali and his agents (1830-70) succeeded in rousing a strong religio-political consciousness among the Bengal Muslims, and fostering the growth of a civic and corporate spirit, a policy of civil disobedience to government and boycott of government organs, especially the courts. The village mosque under its Imam became the centre of this corporate spirit. The remotest villages in Bengal came to be electrified by the *Tarigah i Muhammadiyah*. In 1850 Enayat Ali was found preaching *jihad* in Rajshahi in North Bengal with the assistance of the headmen of many villages. The influence of the Patna School extended mainly in the Northern and Western districts of Bengal—Dinajpur, Maldah, Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Nadia, Burdwan, West Jessore and Twenty-four Parganahs. The school was strongest in those areas traversed by the Ganges and the Bhagirathi. Nevertheless the school did not make appreciable headway and its progress was retarded in Eastern Bengal.



(c) *Taaiyuni Movement of Karamat Ali (1800-1873)*: Sayyid Ahmad's reform movement was further developed by Maulavi Karamat Ali, who largely prepared the ground for the recent organisation, the *Ahl-i-Hadith*. Born at Jaunpur (c. 1800) he chose Bengal as the field of his mission and came here in 1835. Never an extremist and always moderate in his ideas, this orthodox reformer worked in Bihar and Bengal, especially in Eastern Bengal. He insisted on the principle of *taqlid* or conformity to the schools of law (*mazhab*). He identified himself with a particular school of law (or *mazhab*) viz., the orthodox Sunni Hanafi School. Hence his group was called *Taaiyuni* (Arabic *taaiyun*, to identify). He held that the congregational prayers (Juma and Id) were not only lawful but obligatory. He also accepted that doctrines of *Tasawwuf* and *Pir-i-Muridi*. He accepted the tradition of the emergence of a *mujaddid* (renewer of faith) in every century and regarded Sayyid Ahmad to be a *mujaddid* of 13th century A.H. to be followed till the 14th. Karamat differentiated between *shirk* (negation of Islam) and *bid'a* (an error in doctrine) and between a *fasik* (sinner) and a *kafir* (infidel). His life constituted a "double struggle" against un-Islamic practices and heterodoxy, both of which he attacked in his books. A skilful organiser, Karamat Ali showed great power throughout his life for regenerating Islam and revitalizing Islamic life in East Bengal. Sailing on the rivers for a period of nearly forty years on his flotilla constituting a travelling (residential) college, he conveyed the message of Islamic reform and regeneration to the Nagas of Assam and the people of the Bay of Bengal islands, and exercised a 'living influence' on certain districts of Bengal.

(d) *The Ahl-i-Hadis*: The moderation and wisdom of Wilayat Ali (d. 1852) sufficed to maintain unity among the conflicting principles of *ittiba-i-sunna* and *ittiba-i-fiqh*. After Wilayat's death (1852) one group definitely clung to Hanafi school, and the other repudiated *taqlid* or prescription of the schools of law. About 1864 Sayyid Nazir Hussin (b. 1805) of Balthawa in Monghyr district wrote a treatise *Thabut i Haqq al Haqiq* (establishment of the truth) which marked the complete breach. Known as the *Ahl-i-Hadis* (People of Tradition or Partisans of the Prophetic Tradition) this new vigorous school came to absorb most of the reformist tendencies of the nineteenth century Islamic revivalism. The creed of the sect is to go back to the Quran and the authoritative Traditions (Ahadis Sahih). Emphasis is therefore put on (a) reassessment of *Tauhid* (unity of God), denial of occultism (*ilm-ul-ghaib*), rejection of *pirism*; (b) rejection of *taqlid*, i.e., blind acceptance of the four schools of law, and of the *ijma* (agreement) of the Islamic community; (c) individual interpretation (*ijtihad*) of the Quran and Traditions which implies that the person must be sufficiently learned. This is a principle of far-reaching importance. (d) Eradication of all polytheistic innovations or un-Islamic customs. This opponents called them *la mazhabi* (not belonging to any recognised Sunni schools of law). They called themselves 'Muhammadi' indicating their succession to the Sayyid Ahmadi community. The *Ahl-i-*





*Hadis* never became a mass movement in the villages of Bengal, perhaps because of its intellectual character. This relatively small sect, however, finds regular mention in the Census of India. There is an all-India body, All-India Ahl-i-Hadis Conference, which holds annual sessions and there are district organisations in Bengal, Bihar, the Punjab and other parts of Northern India.

### 7. *State of Islamic Religion during the second half of the 19th Century.*

By the close of our period the Bengal Muslims could be broadly classified into five religious groups, the *Sabiqi* (or the Traditional), the *Faraizi*, the *Patna School*, the *Taaiyuni* and *Ahl-i-Hadis*. The *Sabiqi*, the followers of the old customs of the ancestors, consisted of a majority of landlords and generally the descendants of old Sunni families, representing a composite culture in which the various strains of local and foreign traditions were fused. The other four represented the reformist groups, aiming at reforming the old religious and social order, purging it of un-Islamic elements, and also at winning over the *Sabiqis*. The *Faraizi* movement, after effecting some permanent changes in the religious life of Bengal for nearly half a century, gradually began to decline in importance. The death of Dudu Miyan in 1862 was a crisis in the history of the *Faraizis*. For some time the organisation was kept up by the central hierarchy of the triumvirate (the attorney, *mutawalli* and *mutfi*), established by Dudu Miyan. In 1879, his second son, Abdul Ghafur alias Naya (1864-1883) formally assumed leadership and established, according to Nabin Sen, 'a state of his own within the British regime', but he followed a policy of cooperation with the Government. His brother, Saiddin Ahmad (1884-1906) continued his policy of cooperation with the government and supported the partition of Bengal. The death of Wilayat Ali in 1852 and of Enayat Ali in 1858 caused a general setback to their school but it was continued by other agents, as stated before. In the *Taaiyuni* camp, the work of Karamat Ali was continued by his son (Maulavi Hafiz Ahmad, d. 1898) and nephew (Muhammad Muhsin).

Thus there ensued a triangular struggle in Islamic revivalism in Bengal between the *Patna School*, the *Faraizis* and the *School of Karamat Ali*, some of the main points of dispute being the emphasis on prophetic tradition, *taqlid* and authority, and prescription of schools of law, *ijtahid* (or private interpretation), prayers and food. Not only did Karamat Ali criticise the superstitious beliefs and practices of the *Sabiqis*, he also denounced the radicalism of the *Faraizis*, the *Patna school* and *Ahl-i-Hadis*. He at first criticised the *Faraizis* as *Kharijis* and later on as *Wahhabis* 'in reality'. Some progress towards a compromise between the two schools of the *Faraizis* and *Taaiyuni* was made by 1855. Karamat, who introduced an era of religious debate, met Dudu Miyan about 1860. At the Barisal debate (Bahas) in 1867 the *Faraizi* representative, Maulavi



Abdul Jabbar, did not yield on the question of prayers though Karamat agreed on certain points with him. In 1879 another debate was held at Madaripur over the question of Juma prayer between the Faraizis under Naya Miyan and Hafiz Ahmad, son of Karamat Ali, the Taaiyuni leader, which was called *Jamar Yuddha* (or battle of the Juma) by Nabin Sen. In 1903 there was another debate at Daud Kandi between the Faraizis and the Sabiqis over the question of Juma' prayer, leading to a split between the *Juma' wallah* and *bejuma' wallah*. In spite of this prolonged debate over the question of Juma', linked up with that of the country being *Dar ul harb* or *Dar ul Islam*, prayers continued to be held by majority of the Muslims. The Faraijis, however, revived their congregational prayer only after 1947.

Thus Islamic reformation movements did not result in the establishment of religious peace or unity in the land. On the one hand, even the vigour of the revivalist movements did not succeed in wiping out the vestiges of un-Islamic practices and beliefs which had become traditional among large number of Muslims. Heresies and superstitions survived. On the other hand, internal differences between the religious reformers caused splits in the monolithic uniformity of some movement or ranged the different sects in hostile opposition on account of doctrinal conflicts.

Notwithstanding this internal conflict within the bosom of Islam in Bengal, it must be admitted that the Islamic religious revivalist and reformation movements of the 19th century outlined above introduced a new life among the Muslims in Bengal. During a period of political and economic decline of the Muslims, the reformers not only tried to revitalise Indian Islam in Bengal by stricter religious observances, prohibiting un-Islamic practices and emphasizing austerity in life but also to rouse the political consciousness of the Muslims by their call to *jihad* and peasant resistance movements in protest against the British administration and economic exploitation of the masses of the Muslims. Thus religious reform became a many-sided affair,—social, economic, political and communal. The growing process of assimilation between the Hindus and the Muslims during nearly 700 years received a setback. All this encouraged the growth of a spirit of socio-religious as well as political exclusiveness among the Muslims, which assumed a political colour in the next half century.

## NOTES

### Section 1

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## (iv) CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN BENGAL

Missionary writings give a frightful picture of Calcutta and its environs in the mid-eighteenth century, of human corpses lying in various stages of decay all around the bank of Hooghli, of the horrible carnage of Hindu widows at the funereal pyre of their husbands, of half-naked fakirs roaming viciously in the streets, of Hindu mothers casting their infants into the streams and of disgusting celebrations in honour of evil-looking idols<sup>1</sup>. This, according to Christian writers, made out a case for missionary enterprise in India, the great work of conveying to the millions of people enslaved by a mighty system of superstition and cruelty the supreme 'Knowledge of salvation through a crucified Saviour'; 'The monster of Hinduism, the enemy of both God and man' has to be scotched and the country and the people to be delivered from the hold of its hateful and yet formidable influence.<sup>2</sup>

But to see missionary activities in their true perspective, it is, however, necessary to set them not only against the background of prevailing heathenism of India as reflected in missionary writings, but also against the dissolute atmosphere of Anglo-Indian society. The English settlers of early times usually led a godless life. In their personal lives they were a reproach to their countrymen. Immorality, gambling, violence and drunkenness of the British traders had tarnished the fair name of Christianity and made the faith extremely odious to the Indians.<sup>3</sup> Complaints were made about their way of life, particularly against the excesses committed by the early British traders which were too well-known, by interested members of the Company's staff, who pressed home the demand for Christian ministers<sup>4</sup> to look after the moral welfare of the servants of the Company. Indeed, the new charter granted to the second East India Company in 1698 had a clause in it which required the Company to maintain a chaplain and a school master wherever a European regiment was stationed. It was further enacted that the chaplains of the Company should qualify themselves to afford Christian instruction to their Hindu and Portuguese servants in their native languages<sup>5</sup>. But the new chaplains were hardly able to improve the moral standard of the European settlements. They received small salaries and were obliged to eke out a livelihood by engaging in business. Some of them even amassed big fortunes which could hardly have been accumulated from the ordinary wages of clerical labour<sup>6</sup>. The few clergymen who were in Bengal before the battle of Plassey could not leave any mark in the field of their work and two of them, as Richter says, perished in the Black Hole tragedy of 1756<sup>7</sup>.

The chaplains were also debarred from embarking upon any missionary activities as the Protestant nations who had recently overthrown the power of the Spaniards and the Portuguese could not possibly share the Catholic idea of preaching the Gospel among the conquered people. The East India Company also had other reasons to discourage missionary



enterprise because the ascendancy in Bengal which they were struggling to maintain could hardly have been possible by a strict adherence to the doctrine of Ten Commandments or by pressing the 'Gunboat' into the service of Christianity. The idea that the work of conversion was God's worked well with the servants of a private commercial enterprise. Therefore, the clause in the charter regarding chaplains, as mentioned above, though indicative of somewhat of a recognition to the need of Christian instruction was, however, not followed up and the evangelists made it a point of complaint against the Company that they seem to have forgotten that such a provision had ever been made<sup>8</sup>.

This anti-missionary policy of the Company found expression in various statements of the authorities particularly in the one issued by a member of the Court of Directors in 1793 which ran as follows :

The sending of missionaries to our Eastern territories is the most wild, extravagant, expensive, unjustifiable project that was ever suggested and that it would affect the ultimate security of our Eastern possessions<sup>9</sup>. The Company's Government allowed itself to adopt this view which was also reflected in the behaviour of the Company towards the missionaries<sup>10</sup>. It was even proposed that a servant of the Company would be proscribed who should offer pecuniary aid or countenance to missions but the order was not enforced<sup>11</sup>. These despotic proceedings contrary to the principles of religious liberty were very much resented by the evangelists in England led by Wilberforce.

But the latter half of the eighteenth century brought about a change in the attitude of the Englishmen who now realised the need of propagating the Gospel in India. In quick succession three important proselytizing societies were founded, the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, the London Missionary Society in 1795 and the Church Missionary Society in 1799. The zealous and ardent missionaries now came forward to challenge the government that while the non-Christian rulers in Asia gave the missionaries permission to preach the Gospel in their kingdoms, it remained for the Protestant Christian England alone to deny this right to their missionaries<sup>12</sup>. The missionary view of life was further strengthened by a humanitarian spirit stemming from the nineteen years' struggle for the abolition of slavery in the English colonies now brought to a successful termination in 1807<sup>13</sup>.

So in course of time evangelical zeal had influenced the British people for a proper appreciation of missionary work and the climax was reached in 1813 when the question of the renewal of the charter of the East India Company came up before the Parliament. The missionaries demanded full permission to preach the Gospel in India and they fought out their case in the pulpit and in the press.

On the missionary side Wilberforce stood at the head of the movement. He was assisted by Charles Grant and Claudius Buchanan<sup>14</sup> Lord Teignmouth, William Smith and a host of other pro-missionary speakers like Forbes, Whitbread and Pratt. Sati, infanticide, idolatry, religious



suicide, the wild scenes connected with Jagannath at Puri and other such things were all urged in favour of the entry of the evangelist Christian missionaries into India, and thus the won the day<sup>15</sup>.

The relevant clause inserted in the Charter of 1813 ran to the effect that it was the duty of this country to promote the introduction of useful knowledge and of religious and moral improvement in India, and that facilities be afforded by law to persons desirous of going to and remaining in India to accomplish these benevolent designs. The Charter also provided for the establishment of an Indian bishopric, and three archdeacons, and required a sum of not less than a lakh of rupees to be set apart each year for the improvement of literature and promotion of a knowledge of science.<sup>16</sup> The result was that the episcopal system of the church of England was transferred to India and the missionaries gained a footing and a recognition of their position in India. By 1833 their work had made great progress towards evangelization and reform.<sup>17</sup>

Missionary work of the Protestant church in Bengal had been of a very intensive nature even at the initial stages. Started by Kiernander and organised by Carey it bore fruit in the time of Duff and throughout the period from Kiernander to Duff (1758-1863) missionary enterprise received constant accession of strength from other evangelists who arrived at intervals, like Brown, Buchanan, Martyn and Middleton, great names in the ecclesiastical history of India. Christian missionary society and the East India Company functioned in Bengal, undoubtedly enough, as two distinct and separate organisations but a close similarity nevertheless existed in the nature and scope of their work in many a field. A Protestant mission and the Company both secured a footing in Bengal in about the same time 1757-1758, and both attained the height of their power, one in the field of religious evangelism, and the other in the field of political ascendancy by the middle of the nineteenth century, and both in their own ways became the means of projection of Western ideas and influences in the social and cultural life of Bengal. The post-Mutiny period was a period of consolidation for the British Empire in India and no less for its religious counterpart, the episcopal society of the church of England.

The first Protestant missionary to work in Bengal was Rev. John Kiernander of the Danish mission at Cuddalore, who landed in Calcutta on 29 September 1758. He was a Swede by birth and was originally sent to Madras in 1740 under the auspices of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. In 1750 he welcomed the apostolic Schwartz, but eight years later he was compelled, on surrender of Cuddalore to the French, to quit his post in order to escape from the Jesuits. Kiernander was warmly welcomed in Calcutta by Colonel Clive who was impressed by the work of the missionary at Cuddalore. Clive gave him a dwelling house and showed him much personal kindness. Kiernander made Bengal his home, his adopted country and never turned his back on it.

His first step was to open a school to which were admitted a cross



section of people, Portuguese, Armenians and Hindusthanis who were taught through the medium of Indo-Portuguese. The number of the students attending the school rose to 185 at the end of a year<sup>18</sup>. The work of translating the English Prayer book into Bengali was also taken up by one Padri Bento while brisk conversion, it seems, was also going on. It is quite manifest from authentic records that between 1767 to 1776 as many as 495 Indians appear to have been converted including the famous 'Ganesh Das' who was the Persian translator to the Supreme Court<sup>19</sup>. Kiernander also built, what is called the 'Old Mission Church' in Calcutta in 1770<sup>20</sup> at a cost of £8000 sterling<sup>21</sup> and met the whole of it nearly from his own resources. This church of Kiernander, it is claimed, continued until 1784 as the only Christian church in Bengal<sup>22</sup>. The Mission established by Kiernander grew in strength and in ten years ending in 1776, 495 persons were added to it<sup>23</sup>. Several affecting notices given in 1786 of the pious exemplary lives and happy death of various members of mission congregation afford a glimpse of the nucleus of a growing native Christian community, which Kiernander brought into existence. He laboured on till old age and died in 1800 when he was 92<sup>24</sup>.

Kiernander's work did not quite die with him. Contemporaneously with Kiernander, Moravian Brethren worked for a space of fifteen years (1777-1792) in Serampore (then called Frederviksnagar). They learnt Bengali, compiled a dictionary, but were not successful in their mission and eventually retired to Tranquebar in 1791.<sup>25</sup>

This was a period when there was little or no enthusiasm in favour of missionary enterprise. But from 1786 when Rev. David Brown reached Calcutta a succession of distinguished chaplains (ministers sent out for Europeans) of the East India Company continued to arrive at intervals. Protestant missions in India were much indebted to these men of earnest piety and great zeal who by their labours advanced the cause of missionary work in Calcutta. Rev. Brown of this brilliant constellation of evangelists came out as a chaplain of the European Asylum for children, but later on in the declining years of Kiernander, he undertook many of the duties of his mission by giving up his former position. Later on he became the Provost of the Fort William College and earned a name for his zeal in projecting Christian ideals. Dr. Claudius Buchanan, another of the chaplains, came to Calcutta in 1797 and later on served in the Fort William College till 1806. His evangelical efforts knew no bounds. He was a patron of the Serampore missionaries and heavily subsidised their activities.

The age of the chaplains was followed by the age of the missionaries in which the Danish settlement of Serampore, a place about 15 miles from Calcutta took the lead. When the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in 1792, a Leicester cobbler, William Carey offered to become its first missionary. Carey landed in Calcutta in 1793 in defiance of the Company's orders and was poorly equipped and badly handicapped to carry on the evangelical mission which he had taken up. But Carey was a man of





faith, a faith that could remove mountains and subdue kingdoms. His natural talents were great, his intellectual powers were wonderful, and his ability to conquer strange and difficult tongues was almost unique. Unable to do anything in Calcutta he shifted to Sunderbans where life became a veritable hell for him. At this point he was helped by Mr. Udny, the owner of an indigo factory in the Maldah District, who appointed Carey as Manager of the factory and also gave him permission to preach and convert. Meanwhile four Englishmen inspired by the newly kindled missionary spirit responded to Carey's call but unable to land in Calcutta they repaired to Serampore. Their presence excited the suspicion of the authorities and Lord Wellesley, the Governor-General, demanded the 'surrender of the fugitives in order to deport them to England' but the Danish Governor of Serampore refused to surrender them and the matter was not pursued further. The hostility of the British authorities to organised missions obliged Carey to migrate to Serampore where he eventually settled in 1799 and built up the famous Serampore Baptist Mission with the help of William Ward and Joshua Marshman, two members of the team who came from England to join him. These three veritable pioneers lived together on the lines of Moravian brotherhood by throwing all their earnings into a common stock 'each bringing into the mission what he got and receiving what he needed.'<sup>26</sup>

The missionary effort of Carey and his colleagues was the embodiment of all that was best in Christian missionary enterprise in India. For over thirty years, Carey laboured with a crusading zeal and a Catholic enthusiasm for Christian evangelism and Western enlightenment.

It is impossible not to be impressed with the record of the work done by the Serampore missionaries. Indian languages were studied in feverish haste and the New Testament had been actually printed into 31 Indian languages and dialects. "In no country in the world," says Sherring, "and in no period in the history of Christianity was there ever displayed such an energy in the translation of the sacred scriptures into other tongues"<sup>27</sup>. 'The millions of people,' as Wilberforce reflected, 'now got the Bible in their own languages which undoubtedly became the most effective means of propagating the gospel among all classes of people. The proselytizing spirit received further impetus from occasional tours undertaken by Carey and his associates to distant places which soon developed into an itinerating system inevitable in missionary work'<sup>28</sup>. Their direct and evangelistic labours resulted upto 1816 in baptizing about 700 Indian converts<sup>29</sup>. The more important effect of rendering the Bible into Indian languages was that it led to the development of vernaculars in different parts of India, and the development of Bengali prose in particular owes much to the translations and treatises of scholars working under their direction. All this again was made possible because of the printing house that was established through the labours of Ward. That historic machinery was now pressed into the service of evangelism and reform and soon it became a useful institution for the dissemination of learning and



knowledge and the whole complex of Western ideas and influences. The Serampore Press founded in 1818 the first Bengal newspaper called *Samachar Darpan* and an English magazine *The Friend of India* which during its lifetime of 57 years (1818-1875) became a most influential organ of the public life of Bengal.

If Carey and his associates gave the first impulse to the Indian press, they likewise remained pioneers in the field of education in India. The social evils of the country stemming from ignorance and superstition were sought to be liquidated by spreading Christian knowledge. By the year 1818, the mission possessed 126 vernacular schools with 10,000 pupils, all receiving elementary education and Biblical instructions<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, in 1821, Carey established the famous Serampore College for the study of English and oriental classics which ranked among the most splendid educational edifices in India. In so doing, he anticipated the work of Dr. Duff. As in education, Carey also remained a pioneer in the field of social reform. The earliest movement against widow-burning was made by Carey, who brought the subject before the Bengal Government by carrying out an unofficial census of 'Suttees' occurring within thirty miles of Calcutta.<sup>31</sup>

But the energy of this cobbler-saint, the prince of missionaries, flowed into different channels. Carey took a commanding place in the field of scientific research in an era of varied changes. He founded the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of Bengal which soon became one of the most influential societies of India. He and his colleagues also tried their hands in setting up the first steam engine in India and harnessing it to the manufacture of paper on a large scale. Carey also attempted other secular innovations of establishing the system of Savings Banks to counteract the tendency to get into debt.

Besides his Serampore work which covered a wide field ranging from Christian evangelism to material progress Carey's Fort William work was no less fruitful of results. Wellesley founded the Fort William College in 1800 to enlighten the oriental world; 'to give science, religion and pure morals to Asia'. Carey was made the Master and later Professor of the college. The missionaries thought that they could utilise the institution to promote missionary interest to evangelize India and to produce translations of the scriptures into all the languages from 'the borders of the Caspian to the Sea of Japan.'<sup>32</sup> To Carey, his association with the college gave him the opportunity to embellish his scholarly talents and to give a more mature shape to his philological studies. Apart from the Translation of the Bible which was his lifework, he advanced the field of Oriental studies by the impetus he gave to Sanskrit learning. With the assistance of the pundits of the college, Carey published a Sanskrit grammar and dictionary, edited the Ramayana and other Sanskrit works.<sup>33</sup> At Fort William College, Carey was the centre of the learned Bengalis and the encouragement and direction he gave to them made





possible the work of early Bengali scholastics like Mrityunjay, Rajiblochan, Ramram Basu, Golaknath and others.

The age of the missionaries in Bengal was rendered memorable not only by the activities of William Carey but by the contributions of another celebrated missionary, Alexander Duff and the two together, Carey and Duff, gave undoubted distinction and vigour to the Christian cause in Bengal. Carey was to the Christian missionaries in India what John Wesley was to England. A more fiery spirit was necessary to make the influence of the Christian missions more effective. This was accomplished by Duff who made the most striking impact on Bengal society.

In 1813 when the ban on entry of the missionaries was raised and free entry allowed, the number of Christian bodies at work in India began to multiply. There followed the establishment of a network of British missions to be reinforced shortly by the Americans. Of all the missions that worked in Bengal, the Scottish Mission was by far the most well known. Rev. Alexander Duff, who was the first missionary of this mission, the Church of Scotland, came to Calcutta at the end of May, 1830.

Rev. Alexander Duff (1830-1867) was a man of vision. He realised that Christian missions in Bengal had reached a '*Cul de sac*' owing to the conversion of lower classes into Christianity whose presence in the society as he found it, was more of a hindrance than a help to missionary organisation. He therefore thought that the only means of getting out of this rut was to bring the upper and influential classes under Christian influence in order to make Christian community attractive to the Hindu neighbours. This he thought could be achieved by opening schools and colleges through the popularity of which he would be able to gain entrance to the first circles of society who led a developed intellectual life and were the privileged leaders of the country. Furthermore these institutions would be effective instruments for the dissemination of Christian culture in India which would undoubtedly add to the strength of Christianity as a great spiritual force holding its own against the challenge of Hinduism.

So long the missionaries were in favour of Indian vernaculars which were indispensable to them at every turn of their work and indeed they were the first to learn Bengali and reduce it to writing but Duff struck out in an entirely new direction. Missionary circles were interested in the project of establishing an Anglo-Indian University at Bangalore on the model of Scottish institution even before Duff took up the work, but Duff, to whom mission was a kind of education work, took up this line of Christian enterprise with a new vision. In direct opposition to, and surprise of other Bengal missionaries, he set out to influence the upper classes of Bengal by spreading Christian knowledge through the adoption of English language as the medium of instruction (which through the efforts of Macaulay and others had already been accepted as such by the Government). Duff expected that India would be vitalised by the powerful stream of Christian learning communicated to the people by



means of the English language. The vehicle of this new learning, he thought, would be the most potent means of offering the Indians, with great intellectual force, the view that the Western conception of life was also truly idealistic rested as it did on the highest truth, the noblest morality and the sublimest ethical virtues like piety and charity.

The quarter of a century from 1830 to 1857 is, from the educational point of view, the age of Duff. No fewer than 8 other Colleges were founded in different parts of India during Duff's life time on the model of the General Assembly's Institution of Calcutta. Only five years after his school had been opened the new policy of reform based on his ideas had been adopted by the Government of Bentinck in the famous Resolution of the 7th March 1835. Duff's views that English was the best channel for letting in full stream of European knowledge on the minds of those who were destined to direct the public life of India, was also reflected in Lord Hardinge's Educational Despatch of 10th October, 1844 which made acquaintance of the English language and Western ideas essential to anyone who aspired to rise in public life. The cause of English education which he espoused was further reinforced by the Government's policy of grant-in-aid system (1854) which gave an impetus to the rapid growth in the number of Christian schools and colleges.

Quite in accordance with the permissive clause of 1813, Thomas Fanshaw Middleton (1814-1822), a distinguished Greek scholar, was appointed the first English Bishop of Calcutta. Bishop Middleton organised the Calcutta Diocesan Committee and formed the excellent design of founding a Missionary College where the Indian Christians could be trained as preachers and teachers and the work of translating the scriptures could be undertaken. The college situated on the bank of the Hugli could not, however, be completed during the lifetime of Middleton. Reginald Heber who succeeded him as Bishop in 1823 was a distinguished student of Oxford and had a place among English poets. His famous Indian Journal gives an excellent account of the state of the country at that time. Among his successors mention may be made of Bishop Wilson, who built the Calcutta Cathedral, and Bishop Cotton, who imbibed the spirit of Dr. Arnold. But Bishop's College had difficult times owing to its inconvenient situation and later on it was shifted to Calcutta in 1880 under Rev. H. Whitehead.

When the men of Serampore separated from the Baptist Missionary Society in 1816 a new society, the *General Baptist Missionary Society* was founded in the same year. The new society continued the work of the Serampore missionaries. The Bengali translation of the Bible of Carey was vastly improved by Dr. Yates, while Dr. Wenger took charge of the Sanskrit version. In 1893 there were connected with the Baptist Mission 35 missionaries, 3,991 church members, 11,056 Christians and 3,702 children at school.

The activities of other missions were no less encouraging. The London Missionary Society, founded in 1795, was first established at



Chinsurah in 1798 with Rev. N. Forsyth as its first missionary. He was succeeded by Rev. May who took up education as the field of his operation. By 1815 he had 20 schools with 1651 students of whom there were some Brahmins. The number of schools increased later on. This scheme of education was highly approved by Gordon Forbes, the Commissioner of Chinsura and by Marquis of Hastings who even appropriated a monthly grant of Rs. 600/- for the Missionary schools<sup>34</sup>. Rev. May was soon joined by Rev. J. D. Pearson. In 1816 the Society, however, transferred its headquarters to Calcutta where they erected a building in the Dharmatala Street, called the Union Chapel,<sup>35</sup> mainly in the interest of the English dissenters. The building was completed in April 1821, but as a centre for its Calcutta work the Society chose Bhowanipur and then in 1826 they extended their work in other areas. At this time they occupied 21 stations in and about the city and had charge of 13 schools. The villages to the south of Calcutta were worked up by Rev. Messrs Henry Topnley and J. Keith. Another famous missionary of the Society was Rev. A. F. Lacroix who laboured for 32 years in the metropolis.<sup>36</sup> The Educational Institution founded at Bhowanipur in 1837 also progressed satisfactorily. Rev. T. Boaz erected a building for the College in 1853, and Rev. Dr. Mullens, who made a comparative study of Hinduism and Christianity, also remained associated with the College for some time. Mrs. Mullens, a daughter of Rev. Lacroix, took up the cause of female education in India and left her mark in the field of Bengali literature as the author of *Phulmani and Karuna*, describing the faults and virtues of Indian Christians. In 1894 there were connected with the Mission 9 English missionaries, 473 Church members, 1757 adherents and 2875 children at school.<sup>37</sup>

The *Church Missionary Society* founded in 1799 with many distinguished men stepped into the field immediately after the revision of the charter in 1813. Its Corresponding Committees already formed in 1812 in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay quickly commenced operation. In Calcutta, schools were founded at Kidderpore and Dum Dum in 1815 and with the arrival of Greenwood and Schroeter, an Englishman and German respectively, the first mission station was opened at Garden Reach.<sup>38</sup> In 1816, a devout soldier Lieutenant Stewart established a station at Burdwan which during the years 1831-1852 became widely known through its missionary Rev. J. Weitbrecht. Another famous missionary of this Society was Rev. J. Long. He was a man of varied talents. He was in charge of many excellent village schools and yet delighted in antiquarian and historical researches. In 1821, the Church Missionary Society established its headquarters in Mirzapore through the labours of Daniel Corrie. The object in selecting this site in the heart of the native town was to enable the missionaries to come into contact with those wealthy and intellectual people who had the most extensive influence over the country. Schools were opened and a printing press was established. Among others who were associated with the Church Mission in Calcutta the name of



Haberlin stands conspicuous. He was indefatigable in his efforts among the educated youth, preaching in Bengali and English.

The most important branch of the Church Missionary Society was established at Krishnagar in the district of Nadia in 1831. The Rev. W. J. D. Dear and others who worked there planted numerous schools throughout the district and the gospel was steadily pushed. A phenomenal success was achieved in 1838 when about three thousand persons embraced Christianity. It was thought that prospects of succour and help at a time of famine induced the people to embrace the alien faith. The branch of the Mission at Thakurpukur also thrived considerably. In 1893 the Church Missionary Society had 7 English ordained missionaries working among Bengalis, 1581 native Christians, 1254 communicants and 4157 children at school.

In the extensive work of evangelization in Calcutta and in its neighbourhood which was receiving the attention of various missionary bodies, the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* took a prominent share. The Society which was in existence for over a century took charge of the Bishop's college in 1820 and also of other schools made over to them in 1828 by the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* which altogether withdrew from missionary work in 1825. The Gospel Society soon sprang into the front rank of missionary societies then labouring in Calcutta. The first missionary sent by this Society, Rev. W. Morton reached Chinsurah in 1829. In the same year they occupied Tollygunge and in 1837 the mission was extended to villages in the 24-Parganas and Sunderbans and very quickly a series of stations and outposts were founded<sup>39</sup>.

Closely related to the Gospel Society was the *Calcutta Bible Society* which was founded mainly through the labours of Buchanan and Brown who contributed munificently to fund in aid of the translation of the scriptures. Buchanan, as already noticed, had a princely heart and was not zealously intolerant of other faiths like other missionaries. He firmly believed that the seeds of moral obedience and social order which are in Christianity have to be propagated which led him to the venture of founding an ecclesiastical institution like the Bible Society. When he returned to Europe in 1807 he lamented that he had done nothing for evangelization and realising that the scheme connected with the College of Fort William would eventually fail, he became all the more convinced of the need of founding a Bible Society. Many opposed the scheme including Lord Minto whose attitude was not favourable to missionary projects. Minto threatened the withdrawal of the patronage of the government from the translation of the Holy scriptures into the oriental tongues. But Buchanan submitted a memorial in a very firm and yet temperate tone defending the gospel which he was not ashamed to profess.<sup>40</sup> The Society which was founded in these circumstances flourished under the patronage of Christian officials who were in full sympathy with the scheme.

The *Scottish Missionary Society's* activities rendered memorable by





the association of Dr. Duff have already been noticed. In 1893 there were 5 ordained missionaries, 86 Communicants, 15 baptised adherents and 1708 scholars connected with the Church of Scotland. The other organisation of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, had in Bengal in 1893 7 ordained missionaries, 21 communicants, 298 baptised adherents and 3474 pupils under instruction. The *Wesleyan Mission* began to work in Calcutta in 1829 when Rev. Messrs. P. Percival and T. Hudson were appointed to take charge of the Mission's work. They preached, built a native chapel and established schools but the work of the mission had to be stopped owing to some unavoidable circumstances and was not reopened till 1859 when the Wesleyans established themselves at Barrackpore. A centre was also opened in Calcutta in 1862. At the end of the 19th century there were 8 English missionaries, 451 Church members and 2657 school children connected with the mission. The *Oxford Mission Society* came late in the field. It was founded in 1880 mainly by the alumni of Oxford University with a view to work particularly among the educated Hindus of Calcutta. Lectures were delivered and visits to the mission house were invited. The mission was also interested in education and circulated a pamphlet called *Epiphany* among the non-Christians. Equally important in the Indian mission field was the well-mannered and richly financed work undertaken by the American societies specially by the Baptists (*American Baptist Union*) by the Congregationalists (*American Board*), and by the Presbyterians (*American Presbyterian Mission Board*). But they went mainly in the direction of Burma, Ceylon, Assam, and Madras.

These missionary societies, as described above, engaged themselves in many types of activity from pure evangelism to educational and medical work. Down to 1830 they were wholly occupied with proselytizing activities, and since the time of Duff top priority was given to educational missions. But a change came over in the post-mutiny period when old hazards were gone and missionary work became free from handicaps and other difficulties experienced in the early period. The missionaries now addressed themselves to all sorts of philanthropic activity in the form of hospitals and medical work, of famine relief and rural uplift and industrial welfare. Another very important feature of missionary work in the post-mutiny period was that strenuous effort was made to bring education within the reach of mature girls and women. By founding schools and by arranging local meetings in private houses women workers of the different missions came into contact with the ladies of the harem and sought to improve their approach and broaden their outlook. Apart from individual societies, many female members of these organisations became pioneers in this field of work.

It cannot be denied that the very presence of the missionaries produced influences in favour of the Western outlook and the missionaries stood for the whole complex of Christian *Weltanschauung* and were therefore regarded as apostles not only of Christian religion but in general of Western culture as well. The missionaries of the different evangelical societies



thus formed an important channel for the transmission of Western values and Western knowledge.

Conversion is not the field where the missionaries attained any very great success. Conversion came largely from among the lowest castes who were attracted less by the Gospel and more by the prospects of material and social advance. Quantitatively, the number of converts was very few even though missionary efforts were successful among the primitive tribes, and qualitatively also, the converts to Christianity from educated classes were fewer still. But the effect of missionary work was undoubtedly felt particularly in the field of social development where its influence worked in various ways. Yet nationalist impulses of renascent Bengal have tended to ignore or obscure this aspect of the question by linking up the whole history of social progress to the sophisticated ideology of the Brahmo Samaj. The movement of the Brahmo Samaj was, however, not an isolated phenomenon in the 19th century history of Bengal, it was admittedly thoroughly 'suffused' with Christianity. Moreover, missionary enterprise in India was older than any of the indigenous West-orientated experiments.<sup>41</sup>

The fact is that the missionaries constituted an overt challenge to Hinduism. Never before was the Hindu ideal of life, its whole apparatus of social organisation, subjected to such ruthless criticism as was done by the missionaries. The vast missionary literature in India which is mostly full of invectives against Hindu religion is an evidence of the highest value regarding the attitudes of the Christian proselytisers towards this country.<sup>42</sup> The challenge became all the more fundamental and also intellectual because Christianity, unlike Islam, relied upon monastic agencies and not upon military agencies in its evangelical missions, thus leaving the people chance to react in their own way. The contemporary literature of Bengal, partly newspapers of that time, will bear eloquent testimony to the intense reaction that followed the introduction of Christianity. The civilization and religion of the West were assailing every phase of heathenism, its idolatry, its mythology, its castes and other absurdities and everything relating to Hinduism was subjected to a scathing criticism and a merciless exposure.<sup>43</sup> Debates, discussions and lectures on Christian theology and religion became the most usual feature of the public life of Bengal; the whole class of educated gentry was in ferment.<sup>44</sup>

This being the situation, it will not therefore appear unlikely that the missionaries provided the first impulse towards social reform. But this has to be admitted that at a time when both the government and the people were either allergic or apathetic to social reform these foreign agencies focused the supreme need of social changes and pressed the demand for a policy of reform so forcefully that it became ultimately necessary for the government of India not only to appreciate the attitude of the missionaries but also to intervene and participate more extensively in the scheme of social reform.



But at no stage in the progress of these social innovations was there any tendency to rely exclusively on missionary agencies and the increasingly important part played by the Bengalis themselves in the new reforming movements since the thirties of the last century reduced to insignificance the external promptings of reforming zeal of renaissance Bengal, so much so, that in the eventual execution of the series of reforms of the 19th century, the evangelical flavour with which they were couched, gradually receded to the background and indigenous theories and methods remained to impart a spirit of individuality to these social reforms. It will thus appear that the missionaries were an external force in the life of Bengal.

The secular activities of the missionaries are often lost sight of owing to the religious character of their missions. Their share in the improvement of the social condition of the peasantry of Bengal was not less inconsiderable. They took up the cause of the oppressed peasantry who were suffering from many forms of oppression and discussed these matters in the missionary conferences, frequently held. These matters were dealt within the petition submitted to Parliament in 1882, in their farewell address to Lord Dalhousie in 1856, and in their memorial to the Lieutenant-Governor in the same year. In 1856 they even asked for a special inquiry on agrarian matters which was refused. They again submitted a petition to Parliament in 1857 and another to the Legislative Council on behalf of the Rent and Sale Bills. In the memorial submitted to the Lieutenant-Governor in 1861, they advocated the same cause.

The missionaries also stood by the side of the aboriginals and other unsophisticated elements to save them from falling a prey to the exploitation of the moneyed classes, revenue-farmers and land-grabbers. They sympathised with the Santals in their hour of distress and firmly protested against the forced system of indigo planting. When Rev. James Long was prosecuted by the Indigo Planters Association for the version of *Nil Darpan* in English, the missionaries came forward to help him. The tone of the planters' press of that time and the arguments of the prosecuting counsel left no one in doubt that both the government and the European planters and businessmen very much resented the interference of the missionaries in these social questions. Long's case was a stern warning to the missionaries not to espouse the cause of the social destitutes.

The attitude of the missionaries towards Indian religions was, however, one of uncompromising hostility; they were neither very scrupulous in regard to their proselytizing methods, nor restrained in their denunciation of Hindu religion. Even a great educationist of the eminence of Dr. Duff shared to a large degree the prevailing prejudices of the time and assailed Hinduism as a false religion 'a perverse product of the ingenuity of fallen men.'<sup>45</sup> No doubt Bishop Heber and others have recorded their appreciation of Hindu institutions<sup>46</sup> but in general the missionaries of Bengal steadily pursued an anti-Hindu policy. A justification of this attitude, however, rests on the fact that the main object of the missionaries



being evangelization they could not remain uncritical of the Hindu religion and the social system which it represented. It was further urged that the progress of the Christian mission itself depended on the extent to which the indigenous institutions could be undermined by slanderous and scurrilous attacks.<sup>47</sup>

This policy naturally created ill-feeling and distemper between the people and the missionaries, though it does not agree to the general situation because the educated gentry, on the whole, looked with favour upon the English community and the evangelists and did not appear to have connected the latter closely with the Company's government despite their European origins. The fact that the missionaries were not widely supported by the government also tended to neutralise an attitude of direct hostility towards them. Nevertheless, the missionaries were foreigners and it was obvious that they could not fail to gain some prestige from their personal and social connection with the society of the ruling classes.

All these may account for the unsympathetic attitude of the general public of Bengal towards the missionaries and most of the elites of that time including Raja Rammohun Roy, who was not otherwise disrespectful to Carey and Duff, had not much opinion about the 'body of English gentlemen' going out of their way to convert the Hindus. The great Raja reflects: "It is true that the apostles of Jesus Christ used to preach the superiority of the Christian religion to the natives of different countries. But we must recollect that they were not the rulers of those countries where they preached. Were the missionaries likewise to preach the gospel and distribute books in countries not conquered by the English such as Turkey, Persia, etc. which are much nearer England, they would be esteemed a body of men truly zealous in propagating religion and in following the example of the founders of Christianity. In Bengal, where the English are the sole rulers, and where the mere name of Englishmen is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion, cannot be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act."<sup>48</sup> Even the great English philanthropist David Hare felt distressed like Ram Mohun Roy and Radhakanta Deb at the Christian missionaries' policy of gaining converts in educational institutions. David Hare's hostility to the Gospel had alienated the Christians to such an extent that on his death he was not given a burial in a Christian cemetery. But it was Debendranath Tagore who gave the most articulate expression to the anti-missionary feelings of nascent Bengal. His aversion for the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries came from the realisation of the fact that the Christian evangelists were undermining the Hindu religion and society. This drove him to the necessity of establishing some such institutions which would counteract this tendency. Thus the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* which he founded steadily worked in the direction of driving home to the Hindu youths the richness of their culture and the greatness of their religion. In course of time it became a powerful forum for both the progres-



sives and the conservatives and a great force to combat the activities of the Christian missionaries. Many other elites of Bengal of that time were unbending opponents of the missionaries and considered it to be a patriotic duty to wean away the impressionable youngmen of Bengal from the influence of the Christian evangelists. They were, to refer to only a few of the far-sighted leaders of the 19th century Bengal, Prasanna Coomer Tagore (1801-1868), Tarachand Chakravarti (1804-1855), Rasik Krishna Mullick (1810-1858), Motilal Seal, Girish Chandra Ghose and others. To counteract the influence of the free missionary schools which tended to become a fertile ground for conversion, the Hindu Charitable Institution was founded in 1849, mainly through the labours of the leaders described above, which effectively checkmated conversion to Christianity.

Rev. Lal Behari De, the famous Bengali Christian and a great writer, made out a case for the establishment of the United National Church in Bengal on the ground that European Christianity appeared to be too exotic, too alien in Bengal as it was modified by European modes of thought and feeling. The ecclesiastical polity was also purely European taking its colour and complexion from Rome and Geneva which led to the establishment of native churches on European models. This apparently was not liked by the intellectual Christians of Bengal who felt that they were not bound to accept the dicta of an Augustine or Aquinas or Calvin. Lal Behari De in particular was convinced that the native churches were like so many 'forcing gardens' and commented: "But it is not difficult to see that native Christianity cannot develop itself under such artificial and foreign forms. . . . If you wish to see Bengali Christianity develop itself freely and naturally, you must free it from its European trammels, you must remove it from the hot-house of European Church organisation and plant it in the genial soil of Bengali modes of thought and feeling; or in other words, you must make Christianity indigenous in Bengal".<sup>49</sup>

The overtone of a national sentiment as reflected in the above statement cannot be missed. Lal Behari De was the foremost of those nationalist Christians who showed that it was possible to love one's country, his spiritual compliance with Christianity notwithstanding. Madhusudan's famous Ode to Motherland and Reverend K. M. Banerjee's herculean work on Mahabharat reflect the same attitude of the devout love of Bengali Christian for the cultural heritage of his country.

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2. G. Gogerly—*The Pioneers: A Narrative of Facts Connected with the early Christian Missions in Bengal*, London, no date, pp. 1-2, 5, 11, 14.
3. See Terry quoted in P. Thomas—*Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan*, London, 1954, p. 152.
4. Hugh Murray in his *History of British India* gives an authentic account of the outrages committed by the Christian traders, and what is significant, adverts to the fact that actually a mission was sent out to India "to put an end to the exactions of presents by British officials who had enriched



themselves at the expense of native princes." (Vol. I, pp. 277-282). This view is fully endorsed by a missionary writer Rev. Hollis Read who places the 'Mutiny' of 1857 as a nemesis of British rule in India and quotes copiously from many known authorities to bear testimony to the oppressions committed by the officers of the Company which justified missionary interference if only to rectify the moral tone of the early Christian rulers. (*India and its People*, London, 1858, pp. 43-60).

5. J. Richter—*History of Missions in India* (Transl.) Edinburgh, 1908, p. 129.
6. P. Thomas—*Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan*, London, 1954, p. 170.
7. Richter—op. cit., p. 129.
8. Weitbrecht—*Missionary Sketches in North India*, London, 1858, pp. 5-6.
9. Ibid., p. 24.
10. Rev. J. Chamberlain, a Baptist missionary was expelled from India on account of preaching at Hardwar. The opinion was general even amongst enlightened British officials in the country that there could be no more dangerous means of estranging of the hearts of the people from the Government than by attempts to meddle with the religious concerns of the Hindus. Furthermore, the Missionaries were forbidden under threat of grave consequences not to speak to the sepoys about religion under any circumstances whatsoever. (Richter—op. cit. pp. 131-32).
11. Weitbrecht—op. cit., p. 29.
12. For a more forceful argument of the missionaries, See Weitbrecht—op. cit. p. 29 as follows: "There was no instance in history of a people governing a conquered nation by abjuring its own religion, at least the history of the Tartars, the Mahomedans, the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French and the Dutch would not support this principle though this principle itself may not be wholly defensible."
13. K. Ingham—*Reformers in India*, pp. 10-11.
14. The religious views and anti-Indian attitudes of the missionaries have been subjected to severe criticism by Major Scot Waring as noted above. Though not free from prejudice, his opinions are valuable from the point of view of a contemporary observer. His estimate of the work of Claudius Buchanan is both informative and critical.
15. For a critical analysis of the attitudes of the various religious groups and Parliamentary parties on this issue, see Ingham—op. cit., pp. 11-12.
16. Richter—op. cit., pp. 151-52.
17. The removal of the missionary clause was but the first round of the struggle. The Christian Knowledge Society was particularly vehement in its denunciation of the Company's association with Hindu temples and idolatry and all these features including the pilgrim taxes were later on discarded. (Thomas—op. cit., p. 182; Richter—op. cit., pp. 189-90).
18. *History of Christianity in India*—compiled from Sherring, Smith and Bradley, Madras, 1895, p. 24.
19. M. A. Sherring—*The History of Protestant Missions in India*, London, 1884, p. 55 ff. Ganesh Das who was baptized in 1774 was named after Sir Robert Chambers who stood prominently for his evangelical pursuits. (Weitbrecht—op. cit., p. 11).
20. Rev. James Long—*Hand-book of Bengal Missions*, London, 1848, p. 12.
21. Richter—op. cit., p. 130.
22. Long—op. cit., p. 130. Weitbrecht mentions of a Protestant Christian Church which was erected as far back as the year 1715. It was situated at 50 yards distance from the Old Fort at the West End and was raised by the munificence of merchants and seafaring men. A hurricane which occurred in 1737 attended by a violent earthquake levelled the first Calcutta Church to





- the ground but it was soon rebuilt and continued standing till 1756 when, among other devastations committed by the army of the Nawab of Bengal, the church was demolished and the two Government chaplains then at Calcutta perished. (pp. 4-5).
23. *History of Christianity etc.*—op. cit., p. 24. Richter puts the number at 300. (Richter—op. cit., p. 130).
  24. *History of Christianity etc.* A young German missionary, Rev. J. C. Deimer, was sent to the assistance of Kiernander in 1793 but he does not appear to have remained long. Kiernander remained at his post for 28 years (1758-1786). (Richter—op. cit., p. 130).
  25. Richter—op. cit., p. 131.
  26. For an account of the daily routine of the missionaries, see Sherring—op. cit., p. 62.
  27. Sherring—op. cit., p. 75.
  28. For the routine work of the missionaries, see Sherring—op. cit., p. 62.
  29. Ibid., p. 76.
  30. Thomas—op. cit. pp. 166-67; Sherring—op. cit., p. 76.
  31. E. Thompson and G. T. Garrat—*Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, London, 1935, p. 327.
  32. Weitbrecht—Op. cit., pp. 30-31.
  33. Sherring—op. cit., p. 64.
  34. Ibid., p. 81.
  35. See a short pamphlet by Rev. W. G. Brockway : *Union Chapel—Past and Present*, Calcutta, 1894.
  36. Lacroix was considered to be one of the most eloquent and effective vernacular preachers in India. (Sherring, p. 108).
  37. *History of Christianity etc.*, p. 33.
  38. The Garden Reach near Calcutta at that time covered an area of 7 sq. miles and contained 400,000 inhabitants. It is really interesting to find that within this small compass there was a wide variety of Christian organisations. Thus the Church of England maintained 8 churches, Church of Scotland 1 Church and the Free Church of Scotland 1 church. The independents maintained 2 churches and the Baptists 3 churches. The various missionaries in Calcutta worked in a friendly spirit in a wonderful union of heart and purpose and constructed a fraternity for furthering a holy cause. It is specially interesting to find that Calcutta in the early part of the 19th century was a truly cosmopolitan city which harboured people of all faiths. This was reflected in the astonishing variety of places of worship with which the city abounded. In addition to the above churches, there was a Greek church, 1 Armenian church, 5 Roman Catholic chapels, 1 Jewish synagogue, 1 Chinese temple, 167 Hindu temples and 74 Muhammadan mosques. (Weitbrecht, pp. 47-48).
  39. Richter—op. cit., p. 196; Sherring—p. 95.
  40. Weitbrecht—op. cit., p. 43; Sherring—op. cit., p. 67.
  41. K. Ingham—*Reformers in India*, p. 1.
  42. See K. A. Ballhatchet : *Some Aspects of Historical Writings on India by Protestant Christian Missionaries during the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries*, in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*—ed. by C. H. Philips, p. 344 ff. See also views of Duff quoted in *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Vol. X, Pt. II, p. 155.
  43. Sherring—op. cit., p. 96.
  44. For the view of Raja Rammohan Roy, see *Works of Rammohan Roy*, pp. 145-46, quoted in *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Vol. X, Pt. II, pp. 15-16.
  45. A. Duff—*India and Indian Missions*,





46. Weitbrecht—op. cit., p. 73, cf. also the statement of the Madras lawyer, Mr. Marsh, quoted in Thomas—op. cit., p. 129. Ballhatchet has also drawn attention to the pro-Hindu attitude of some of the missionary writers. (C. H. Philips—Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, p. 345 ff).
47. Ingham—op. cit., p. 4.
48. Quoted in British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance (ed. by Dr. R. C. Majumdar). Vol. X, Part II, p. 16.
49. The Desirableness and Practicability of organizing a National Church in Bengal : A lecture delivered at the Bengal Christian Association on Monday, the 13th December, 1869 by the Rev. Lal Behari Dey, Calcutta, 1879.



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